

MONTESSORI: Educating the adolescent

Adolescence is a powerful age—it can be an age of explosive growth accompanied by a change of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual levels. It is a significant period in human development—students of this age are no longer children, not yet adults, but are possessing many characteristics of both. How can the needs of the adolescent best be served?

One facet of the educational aspect to consider for the adolescent is the Montessori Middle School, which is committed to creating a supportive community, an environment in which students can be leaders and their voices can be heard. The goal in Montessori is to provide an education that prepares middle school students to think deeply and critically, to be intellectually independent, and to value the viewpoints of others. Questions along with honest, open discussions that connect students to the world of ideas are encouraged and expected.

The Montessori Middle School follows a four-day work week where students are provided with rigorous and challenging academic programs that support their inquisitive nature. The fifth day is reserved for outdoor experiences, both land and water-based. True to Dr. Maria Montessori's vision for the middle school student this program features meaningful work on the water and land, while instilling an environmental ethic that includes respect and reverence for the natural world, a vital component in the lifestyle of today

and into the future. Students experience rock climbing, caving, orienteering, farming, hiking, sailing, and kayaking.

The Montessori School's story begins with Dr. Maria Montessori, Italy's first female physician and one of the great educators of our century, who founded the Casa de Bambini in Rome in 1907. It is her vision for education that has guided the school for over four decades. Dr. Montessori fervently believed that children have an inner force that inspires them to achieve their goals. When children are given the proper measure of guidance and freedom, this inner force enables them to focus deeply on the task at hand. Montessori children are inspired to learn with wonder and confidence.

Special projects throughout the year further deepen the students' educational experience. In their study of economics, students design a product and develop a business plan, then create their product and sell it in a marketplace setting. The marketplace empowers students to test their entrepreneurial skills as they participate in a hands-on business experience learning mental fortitude and the willingness to take a risk.

Community service is a priority at The Montessori Middle School. Each student lives as a member of a larger group that thrives only when each member contributes. Students initi-

ate, organize, and run outreach efforts that have included Rake & Run for the elderly, fasting to raise both awareness and funds for World Hunger Day, a Midnight Run outing in New York City in support of the homeless, and a Senior-Senior Prom at Norwalk's Senior Center.

The Montessori School hosts a variety of visiting scholars annually. Most recent visits have included Kenyan Congressman and Masai warrior, Joseph Lekuton; Tibetan dignitaries Tenzin Samten and Tenzin Choeyl; and Italian composer and conductor, Roberto Molinelli. The ability to encounter and learn from such a collection of international visitors brings the Middle School student much closer to a global awareness.

Adolescents are, by nature, focused on themselves both physically and emotionally. Their bodies are changing so rapidly that they can be unbelievably awkward and incredibly graceful in almost the same moment. They can be beautiful, anxious, supremely self confident, and brilliant—they can also be intensely idealistic, and therefore concerned about injustice in the world as well as in their own communities. Today's adolescents are the key to the future, and they have the ability to shape our world. Give them the right environment and they will certainly blossom through adolescence into successfully positive, productive, and self-assured adulthood. Considering The Montessori Middle School for your child can aid and support them in that process. ♦