Dear friends,

I am immensely excited to share with you that Stepping Stones Montessori School is growing. Informed by our strategic planning process—with input from staff, current and former families, and our Board—and after a great deal of research and preliminary planning, Stepping Stones is adding an adolescent program in the 2018-2019 school year!

As we get closer to its opening, there will be many opportunities for you to learn more and get involved. Most immediately, we are raising funds to support the program, working with Montessori adolescent experts to develop a curriculum and programming, creating an enrollment plan, and securing community partnerships.

This is an incredible time for our school’s community. Thank you in advance for your support as we begin writing this new chapter of Stepping Stones’ history.

My very best,

Elizabeth Topliffe
Head of School
Remaining true to our deep Montessori roots, Stepping Stones’ exploration of this program centered on meeting the unique developmental needs of adolescents.

In her research, Dr. Maria Montessori observed that children in the first two planes of development (ages 0-6 and ages 6-12), are self-focused. They are absorbing everything they can from their environment, developing their sense of self, gaining a sense of right and wrong and always asking “why?”

During the third plane of development, adolescents become oriented towards society and where they fit in this broader context. They need to understand and experience what it means to live as adult members of society beyond the comforts of home and the classroom.

**HERE’S A CLOSER LOOK AT DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF STUDENTS DURING THIS TIME:**

| EMOTIONAL NEEDS: | • Further cultivate self-confidence  
|                 | • Do meaningful work  
|                 | • Be empowered  
|                 | • Develop autonomy  
|                 | • Have usefulness beyond self  |
| PHYSICAL NEEDS:   | • Participate in varied physical activity  
|                  | • Develop healthy eating habits  |
| SOCIAL NEEDS:     | • Build community and contribute to causes  
|                  | • See themselves as valued members of a group  
|                  | • Build a value system  |
| COGNITIVE NEEDS:  | • Exposure to a variety of activities  
|                  | • Develop habits of inquiry  
|                  | • Express creativity  |

**FACTS AT A GLANCE**

• Serving grades 7, 8, and 9
• Located on a 100-acre farm, just 10 minutes from our main campus
• Student driven agribusiness
• Broad areas of study—from microbiology to economics
• Private Montessori school
• Opening 2018-2019 school year
Dr. Montessori’s philosophy of education describes a farm community as being the ideal educational environment for adolescents preparing for adult life. The farm offers limitless learning opportunities that touch on all areas of study. It brings abstract concepts to life—allowing students to more deeply experience how humans live and work together.

Stepping Stones Adolescent Community will be located on a 100-acre farm off Pettis Road in Ada. Here, our students will broaden their studies in areas like math, science, language, and history through purposeful work on the land. They will learn about economic empowerment by running their own business. They will also gain first-hand experience of the interdependency of humanity and nature. The environment will allow for self-expression, socialization, collaboration, and a sense of responsibility.

Stepping Stones’ program will be the first farm-based Montessori adolescent program in West Michigan. We are modeling our program after the Adolescent Community at Hershey Montessori in Huntsburg, Ohio. This is a truly remarkable program. Learn more about it at hershey-montessori.org.
MEET OUR VISIONARIES, RANDY DAMSTRA AND JULIE DUISTERHOF

Randy Damstra and Julie Duisterhof have been generous partners of Stepping Stones Montessori School for more than twenty years. Their children, Mitch, Katie, and Leah, all attended Stepping Stones.

Randy and Julie are big-thinkers who like to create opportunities for individuals and the Grand Rapids community. Their belief that families in our community need alternatives to traditional education, and their strong commitment to Montessori, especially in a land-based program, led Randy and Julie to offer River Ridge Farm to Stepping Stones Montessori School for this exciting new venture.

MEET KATIE HOOKS POWELL, ADOLESCENT PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Katie Hooks Powell is a Stepping Stones Montessori School alumna and current parent. She joined the Stepping Stones Montessori team as Adolescent Program Director in June 2017.

Katie holds an MBA from The George Washington University’s School of Business and a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania, where she studied philosophy and intellectual history. She has experience with education policy and most recently served at reason.com, managing their digital marketing and nonprofit operations.

Katie is thrilled to have the opportunity to apply her passion for social change and understanding of business, economics, and self-directed learning to building the next chapter at Stepping Stones, the community that cultivated a lifetime love of learning in her.

JOIN US!

Enrollment information and applications are available at www.steppingstonegr.org.

You can also be a part of Stepping Stones Adolescent Community by making a financial gift of any size today. Donations can be made online at steppingstonesgr.org/donate.

LEARN MORE

Contact Katie Powell, Adolescent Program Director at (616) 451-8627 or katie.powell@steppingstonesgr.org.