Montessori of Macon’s Mission
“To Educate the Whole Child for a Whole World.”

By the whole child, we mean the social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of being human. By nurturing the wholeness of our children and fostering respect for each other, nature and community we prepare them for a life of continued joy that will contribute positively to a whole world.

Macon’s Only National Merit Semifinalist is a MOM Alum

Lydia Good has been named a National Merit semifinalist in the 2017 National Merit Scholarship Program. Lydia joined the Montessori community at St. Andrew’s Montessori for preschool and Kindergarten. She attended Montessori of Macon from 1st through 7th grade. We are very proud of her for being among only 16,000 semifinalists nationwide. She will have the opportunity to become a finalist and compete for a $2,500 scholarship to be awarded this spring. Finalists for the program will be announced in February, and we wish her the best of luck!

Jeronimo, Shea, Delia, Hayes, and Carley show a diagram of a cell they designed for a synthesis week. They used song lyrics to describe how a cell’s organelles work.
Montessori Through Middle School!

Many of us found Montessori and this method of education when our children were very young. As they get older, sometimes the external pressure to go to a traditional school increases. As a family, you are continually evaluating what is best for your child and trying to navigate decisions accordingly. As you think about the characteristics of a Montessori education that initially appealed to you in the early years, I hope you will realize the benefits of continuing a Montessori education through the 8th grade!

In case you are thinking, “Of course the Head of School thinks my child should be enrolled in the Montessori of Macon middle school,” … you are right! There are many reasons why I believe that, however the most important reason is because a Montessori middle school was designed specifically to meet the needs of adolescents. In addition to taking my word, you should also trust the research.

In 1989 the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development published a 106 page report, “Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century.” The study made the following recommendations to enhance the education for middle school students (Changes Urged in Adolescent Education, Fiske, 1989)

- Reduce school sizes to create more intimate schools.
- Assign every student an adult who “has the time and takes the trouble” to talk with them.
- Build on adolescents’ preoccupation with social relationships by allowing small groups of students to work together on projects.
- Organize teachers into interdisciplinary teams with discretion to modify curriculums, schedules and other aspects of learning to meet changing student needs.
- Encourage volunteer work and other means of getting students involved in the community.

It is no surprise that a Montessori middle school program and curriculum were designed to support how middle school students learn best! Within our middle school program you will find all of the above components and more. The middle school classroom is an intimate community for adolescents. In the classroom, the students not only get to know each other but they also get to know their teachers.

Adolescents want to work together … well, until they don’t want to work together anymore! The work in the Montessori middle school is a blend of individual and group work. This organization provides a platform for students to learn how to work within a group and to get along with others, and it prepares them for the expectations of college and the workplace. Opportunities in group learning are not limited to group work: they include Socratic dialogues, lively class activities and discussions, etc. and allow students themselves to propose and carry out class projects as leaders and class community members.

The relationship between student and teacher is a critical component in establishing mutual respect and trust. The teachers work very hard to balance and support all of the needs of the students—academic needs, physical needs, emotional needs, social needs, etc. Weekly, teachers meet with each student for advisement. During advisement both the teacher and the student discuss anything that is relevant to the student. Topics might include getting work completed on time, questions about a lesson, struggles with time management,
Montessori Through Middle School (cont.)

celebrating accomplishments, sorting out relationship with peers, and much more. Additionally, the close-knit relationship of the teachers and student in the middle school classroom allows teachers to help students problem solve individually and as a group on a daily basis, in real time.

The curriculum is interdisciplinary to allow students the opportunity to synthesize content to identify themes, similarities, differences, patterns, etc., or as Dr. Montessori said, “to establish the relationship between things is to bring knowledge.” The Montessori middle school curriculum is designed not only to increase the students’ knowledge of the world around them but also to increase their knowledge about themselves. Young adolescents are struggling to find out who they are, and a safe, intimate Montessori classroom is instrumental in supporting them through their discovery of self.

In addition to benefiting from an integrated and engaging curriculum, the Montessori middle school student experiences the outside world through the farm program, electives, internships, field trips, and community service. Students use opportunities to begin to discover their passion and to assist them as they are working to form their identity. This helps students develop a sense of their value in a local and global community.

A Montessori middle school program supports the whole child. We know during adolescence the body is going through many changes and can be a tumultuous time both physically and emotionally. With this in mind, a school and a program that focus and support the whole child is more critical than ever.

One of Montessori of Macon’s former parents, Dr. Tanya Sharon, Associate Professor and Psychology Department Co-Chair at Mercer University said, “My daughter attended Montessori of Macon from Kindergarten through Middle School. Many parents recognize the beauty of the Montessori materials and philosophy for young children, but fewer seem to recognize that Maria Montessori was absolutely spot-on with older children as well. A textbook I use for a college developmental psychology course talks about middle school as being ‘the wasted years’ academically, and indeed the prevailing approach in most middle schools seems to be simply containment/damage control. Maria Montessori’s approach was much more positive, and healthier: adolescents are viewed as adults-in-the-making and given chances to explore, expand, and demonstrate their developing capacities. Through raising chickens and growing vegetables, the adolescents learn not just academic competence but responsibility; through their seminars on sophisticated primary sources and debates on current events they are learning how to be the kinds of thoughtful, aware adults we need in the world.”

I agree with Dr. Tanya Sharon … Maria Montessori was absolutely spot-on!
Lessons, lessons, and more lessons, our toddlers are super busy at work! Daily they are exploring, through hands-on activities. It’s always rewarding to see so much growth and progress take place in just a matter of a few months. Already our toddlers are moving throughout the classroom with great purpose and focus. They have a huge expression of confidence with the different tasks they take on. Most of them will gladly say “I can do it myself.” It’s this type of attitude that prepares them for the bigger challenges ahead.

During the fall months we have enjoyed the nice weather. We have been able to work outside on the patio in addition to the classroom. This is always the perfect time of year to learn about farm animals, enjoy nature walks and discuss all the changes we see taking place, such as the leaves changing colors and falling to the ground. We also had the chance to do some baking. The children helped prepare and mix the ingredients to make banana bread. Cooking lessons are always a huge favorite among toddlers.

Some of our other lessons include pumpkin scrubbing, cheese slicing, cream cheese spreading on crackers, the red barn and farm animals and table setting, just to name a few.

As the year progresses I’m looking forward to observing the changes and growth of our students, as they continue to learn about the world around them.
Toddler 2 had a busy first half of the school year. The children started the second session working with shapes and numbers. They also explored and learned about the colors purple, green and orange. The children are now learning how to work together with group activities. At the beginning of the school year, we help the children choose shelf activities as they gain independence. As friendships build in the classroom, we see many children want group work choices as well. This is a perfect opportunity for purposeful, associative play. We have many group activities on the patio, often in the form of sensory learning and practical life skills.

This session, the toddlers worked together to wash a large pumpkin for a few days leaving it sparkly clean so we could display it in our classroom; and later to cut and explore the seeds. The toddlers worked together with the popcorn funnel work. They loved the opportunity to scoop, pour and funnel the popcorn kernels into the pipe. The popcorn made a continuous sound as it passed through the pipes and into the bowls. It was a beautiful thing to see the satisfaction on their faces while enjoying this patio work. The children also worked on group activities within the classroom as well. It's amazing to me how much the toddlers learn from one another.
Children do not grow uniformly, but instead in stages or phases. Maria Montessori observed these developmental periods and she referred to them as sensitive periods. In general, sensitive periods are full of intense concentration. The child will continuously repeat an activity until an inner satisfaction is met. This process of repetition is called normalization in the Montessori Method.

These periods can be seen when the child demonstrates unusual capabilities in acquiring particular skills; for example, a child's remarkable ability to learn language(s) during the first three years of life.

I consider myself very fortunate to witness the children going through one of the most intense sensitive periods of their lives, the one from 3 through 6 years old. Dr. Montessori referred to this period as the conscious absorbent mind. During this period, the child begins to intentionally and purposefully learn by interacting with our prepared environment. The fundamental focus of the child during the primary years is intellectual development and freedom. "Let me do it myself!"

During this second session, I have observed all of our 25 students going to different specific interests, from sounds to letters to reading, from rote counting to carrying addition, and the most important part is that they are doing it all by themselves!

At the same time, we as a group had the chance to continue learning about autumn, several famous artists, peacemakers, and leaders. In our Geography lessons we talked about cartography and studied North and South America. We have learned about political and biome maps, culture, population, and flags. And of course, we had a blast during our annual Fall Festival.

As the holidays approach, we will recognize how all cultures and religions have festivals and celebrations that go back to ancient times. This is an invaluable opportunity to learn and celebrate the diversity of our community and the planet we call home.
The Primary 2 classroom celebrated the arrival of autumn this session. The reduced temperature allowed us to begin our workday upon arrival. The students made independent choices and received lessons without a morning group time. We are working towards a complete 3 hours of uninterrupted work time. The focus and concentration among the children is definitely increasing. After a busy morning, the children enjoyed outdoor playtime prior to chores and lunch.

The children sliced, measured, stirred and enjoyed creating homemade applesauce in the crockpot. We used the electric juicer for fresh apple juice and tasted several apple varieties. Our art shelves were filled with pasting, coloring and cutting apples and autumn trees as well as pumpkins for creating Jack-o-lanterns! The pumpkin scrubbing was a favorite for many of the students this year.

In honor of National Fire Prevention week in October, Madison’s dad Chris came in to speak to the children about fire safety. Chris brought his uniform and allowed the students to handle it while he explained the purpose of each piece. We appreciate his gentle and informative presentation!

This session we began Friday morning music sessions with Mr. Robert. The students look forward to his visits and are engaging more with the familiar songs he is sharing with them. Mr. Robert brought a unique musical instrument to share, the Theremin. The kids were fascinated by the sounds created by simply placing their hands in varying proximity to the antenna. Mr. Robert also worked with our children on the song they sang at the Winter Performance, “Lean On Me.” I found myself with both eyes watering as I listened and watched the children learn the words to this song. What perfect lyrics to share with a group of Montessori primary students.
In the Lower Elementary classroom, the children are taught five Great Lessons. These lessons give the children a scaffolding, or a framework to organize information in their minds. They can use this framework the rest of their lives to build on their knowledge of the world around them. Traditional schools teach a lot of facts. I learned many facts during my school years. I still remember many of them! What I didn't get was a basic picture in my mind of how these facts were connected to all my education and the world.

In the First Great Lesson, the children are given a dramatic presentation of how the universe began. It continues through the formation of Earth and the Solar System. The children spend much time studying the different planets, and particularly Earth.

The Second Great Lesson is all about life coming to Earth. It starts where the first lesson left off: the oceans are formed, but poisonous. The children learn of the animals that were living as evident by the fossil record. This lesson teaches the progression of animals from one-celled organisms until the hominids come on the scene. We have many materials for the children to explore and learn about these different animals. Some are about the very popular dinosaurs!

The Third Great Lesson is titled “The Coming of Man.” It teaches the scientific theories of how scientists believe man evolved from the hominids presented at the end of the Second Great Lesson. It is an interesting and amazing scientific study. The children really enjoy the ideas and understanding they receive from this lesson. The timeline presented starts with primitive man and ends right before recorded history.

“The History of Writing” is the Fourth Great Lesson. Starting with cave drawings, the children think about how man began to need a way to communicate in written form. We think about man’s need for self-expression and a practical way to conduct social interactions. A good bit of history is taught about the ancient civilizations around the Mediterranean Sea. These civilizations contributed greatly to the development and spread of the European alphabet. The children are interested to learn that the Chinese people’s advances in writing were so different from the Europeans’ because of Earth’s geography: high mountains and vast distances.

The final Great Lesson is the “History of Math.” It is an introduction into the development of mathematics. This lesson concentrates mostly on the development of numbers and Roman measurements. Upper Elementary develops this further.

Since our Five Great Lessons are presented each year of Lower Elementary, the children are able to become gradually more knowledgeable about them as their three years go by. Also, they are able to work on materials more deeply as they mature. Our children leave the Lower Elementary class with a good foundation. They can add more knowledge as they move through their future lessons, connecting information and facts to this broad framework of knowledge.
The continent of Europe has been under scrutiny in the Lower Elementary 2 classroom this session. Our first years have created biome maps which analyze the locations of the continent’s polar regions, mountains, grasslands, temperate forests, and wetlands and they’ve studied an example of each of the vertebrates that live in these areas. Our second year students have investigated the plant life and invertebrates of each biome and they have mapped the political landscape of Europe. Third year students have worked with our pin maps to locate major landforms as well as the countries and their capitals. They’ve also researched people groups who live in each of the biomes.

Our thinking about the different people groups throughout the world and throughout history is framed by our lessons on the Fundamental Needs of Humans: all humans need food, shelter, clothing, transportation, a means of defense and they also have a need to express themselves through art, music, dance and religious observance.

Each of our students chose a favorite country to focus on. They used a book about their chosen country to learn a little more. Some students identified famous landmarks. They studied and recreated a paper copy of the current flag for that country, then made a smaller canvas flag that will become part of our class collection.

They also created a “paper doll” representative of a person from their chosen country. Some of our students chose to represent people from the past, while others focused on individuals of today. Their finished work created a colorful display on our deck for Culture Fest!

Looking at the current political map of Europe has inspired us to look further into the continent’s history. We already knew a little about the Vikings of northern Europe from our reading last year about the explorations of Leif Erikson and his discovery of North America. Our work with the History of Language in previous years has given us a bit of prior knowledge about the ancient civilizations of Europe. We know of the Early Humans who created the first art in places like the caves of Lascaux, France and many other similar locations. We’ve learned about the Greeks and the Romans. To add to this knowledge, we’ve done some reading about the Celtic people and Anglo-Saxons and we’ve talked about how people might have migrated throughout Europe. We’ve enjoyed listening to Celtic music and we’ve read from a modern children’s version of Beowulf, the Old English epic poem considered to be the earliest example we have of the written English language. There’s so much more to learn and explore, but it’s time to move on!
How do you plan your to do list each day? Do you plan for the week? For the month? Learning time management and planning skills is an important part of Upper Elementary.

Students in Upper Elementary begin to have assignments and due dates to prepare them for future life. They have daily tasks, such as practicing math facts or learning more about fractions. They have tasks to complete multiple times a week, with the freedom to choose which day it is completed. They meet weekly about cultural topics and must prepare for each lesson. Finally, the older students have long-term projects, with due dates weeks away in the future.

All of these assignments require different types of planning and prioritizing skills. In 4th grade, students are only given math homework if they do not complete their daily work during the school day. This creates realistic life-choices: Would I rather focus and finish my work at school, or socialize and have homework? How would homework affect my afterschool activities and/or free time? Students learning about the natural consequences of our choices and actions is an invaluable lesson.

Just as students are unique in how they learn and think, they are equally unique in how they plan and organize their work. Some students split up work in equal intervals, others save it for the end of the week when the pressure of the weekly assignments is on and then some do it all at once, to “check that off of their to-do list.”

Each morning, as students gather for their morning meeting, we ask them to create a to-do list for the day by writing numbers in their work plan: affectionately called their “1,2,3s.” The teachers check their plan each morning. Here we see the skill of prioritizing develop. Some see daily work as most important, thus it is always at the top of their list. Others see preparing for lessons as most important, or question how long it will take to complete. They may want to give themselves ample time to complete their assignments. Some know they will be mentally tired after multiple math works, and will plan an art or optional work afterwards. Others are able to see the whole picture of their week and plan for the week on Monday. Some take each day at a time, often preparing for lessons on the day of or the day before. Teachers check their plan and give suggestions if needed. Often when asked, students are able to rationalize their choices, showing that they fully comprehend how to plan and prioritize.

Just as in Primary where they learn to tie their shoes, in Upper Elementary the children are continuing to learn life skills that will serve them forever, with the guidance of their teachers.
One of the structures unique to Middle School is daily small group work. The purpose of group work is two-fold: first, to learn information with peers, guided by a teacher; second, to know that information well enough to teach it to the rest of the class in an engaging way. Group work is a valuable part of the curriculum—brain research shows that adolescents learn best and retain more when they learn from each other. Group work is hands-on, self-directed, and allows for ongoing synthesis of new information. Additionally, the students gain and hone social, communication, and collaboration skills.

To prepare a group lesson, the students research, discuss, and create a lesson on a given topic in Social World or Natural World, depending on where we are in the cycle. The lessons include an auditory/speaking part, visual section, and a kinesthetic activity. Group work can also include book clubs, discussions on grammar, science experiments, and even the occasional presentation to another campus classroom during a synthesis week, when group work can take on a different form. Lessons during a synthesis week can be more creative and are about applying the information in new ways.

Usually, however, group work lessons are presented within our class, and students receive peer and teacher feedback on their work. Because the group work requires the help of each member, it helps teach the class that there are real consequences to how well they learn to work together and how they treat each other, promoting one of the core goals of Montessori—peace education.

Group work includes specific steps, including making a plan to break up the work over the week, researching and taking notes as a group, discussing the information, meeting with a teacher to go over the information, making lesson cards, creating a visual component, and designing a kinesthetic activity that helps the students learn the lesson through movement and touch.

Additionally, every three weeks, each group completes a group work assessment and chooses one thing to improve in their group. This can range from the way they approach a project to the way they communicate about how they feel when annoyed. The reflection engenders maturity, growth, and self-awareness that is a joy to see.