

## **Our Mission Statement**

We nurture children to be creative, eager learners as they discover their full potential and become responsible global citizens.

## **About Our Middle School**

Welcome to the Middle School. The Greensboro Montessori School's Middle School educates students in grades 6, 7 and 8. In accordance with the Montessori philosophy, we provide a carefully planned, stimulating environment that enables children to develop within themselves habits, skills, attitudes and ideas essential for a lifetime of creative thinking and learning.

Dr. Montessori recognized that the only "valid impulse to learning is the self-motivation of the child." Children move themselves to learning. The teacher prepares the classroom with materials to stimulate the child's curiosity. The teacher may direct the activities, but it is the child who acquires the knowledge through his or her own experience.

Montessori methods and practice incorporate proven, developmentally appropriate activities introduced to multi-age groups. Student work is presented in a linear fashion with work gradually increasing in complexity. A Montessori classroom offers choice within limits, an approach which promotes critical thinking and self-expression. Our program expands opportunities for students to pursue individual interests and creates an environment that encourages a multifaceted approach to studies.

Montessori methods and practice also stress the importance of being responsible global citizens. As students acquire the ability to think more abstractly, they are able to see themselves as part of the larger whole. As students work in the community, they see themselves as contributing members of society.

## **Studies**

The Greensboro Montessori School prides itself in offering a Cosmic Education which continues through the Middle School years. Cosmic Education, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, emphasizes the interrelationship and interdependence of each of the elements of our environment, and is presented in an engaging, multi-sensory format that challenges and inspires.

Throughout the elementary years, students are introduced to Cosmic Education through the Great Lessons. These lessons are integrated by exploring the fundamental needs of all humans. Maria Montessori places these fundamental needs into two groups: physical and spiritual. The Middle School will build upon these lessons that are at the core of the elementary classroom by taking an integrated approach to the study of science, math, social studies, English, Spanish, art, performance, and garden. This approach teaches students by examining these common needs.

Our curriculum weaves the above subjects together under common themes in a three-year cycle. These themes are: Origins, Survival, and Possibilities. Students revisit the Great Lessons in greater detail than they have previously. Each subject area and how it relates to a particular year's theme is discussed in the curriculum section of this handbook.

## **Work Expectations**

Dr. Maria Montessori said, "The hand is the chief teacher of the child." Children learn by doing. Teachers serve as guides, helping students clarify, problem solve and brainstorm. Teachers observe each

student at work to determine how best to guide the student. With this in mind, it is important that each student completes her or his work. In this way, students practice the new skills being presented, and the teachers have the opportunity to observe how the students' skill levels are building.

It is essential that the work be done to the best of each student's ability (neatly, completely, etc.). Students are expected to seek help when they do not understand an assignment, concept, or directions.

It is also important for work to be completed in a timely manner. Students and teachers will have frequent conferences to best determine the amount and type of work a student needs to do in order to build various skills. If a student is unable to complete work by the date it is due, he or she needs to communicate this fact to the teacher as soon as possible. After conferencing with the teacher, a student may have the opportunity to submit late work (usually by the following morning prior to 8:30am). Late work may result in a decreased grade (-10%). If the student does not meet his or her obligations regarding late work, no credit will be earned and the grade will result in a score of 0. If a teacher feels that a student is having difficulty completing work, parents will be contacted and a conference with student, teachers and parents may be necessary.

### **Student Responsibilities Regarding Work**

Each student is given a planner in which he/she writes assignments for the week. The assignments are posted at the GMS web site: [www.thegms/mshomework/login.html](http://www.thegms/mshomework/login.html). Each teacher will conference with students when new work is introduced (typically at the beginning of each week) and, together with the student, set individual goals and responsibilities concerning the work. This approach encourages each student to take responsibility for his or her learning as well as enabling the teacher to better individualize instruction. Students are expected to contact the teacher prior to class, preferably by e-mail, if clarification is needed on an assignment. It is our expectation that parents provide an appropriate time, place, and atmosphere and the supplies necessary to allow the student to complete high quality work at home when necessary.

Students have scheduled times during the week that they are expected to use wisely to work on assignments, conduct research, and obtain assistance. Papers and long term projects are assigned from time to time and often require a student to spend time out of class conducting research, rehearsing, etc. It is reasonable for a Middle School student to complete unfinished work and/or extra practice work at home. It may also be necessary to have weekend work. The time needed to complete work at home will vary from student to student based on individual study habits, skills, and abilities.

When a student organizes her or his time well, she or he is better prepared for class, able to juggle outside activities with schoolwork, and able to fulfill her or his obligations inside and outside of class. All work assigned is meaningful and allows the student to practice important skills and apply acquired knowledge.

### **Evaluation**

Dr. Montessori believed that the goal of education is to help children develop independence and to take responsibility for their own learning. To this end, Middle School students play an active part in the evaluation of their work.

Students examine and reflect on their own progress by maintaining electronic portfolios of their work. Each student leads his/her conferences at the end of the first and second trimesters with parents and teachers in attendance.

Teachers evaluate students through observation and in a variety of other ways, depending on what is most appropriate for the student and the coursework. Progress reports will be sent home at the end of each trimester.

Because Middle School students lead their own conferences, these days are mandatory and counted as contact days. The conference dates are published on the school's website, under the calendar section.

### **Transition to High School**

During the time students spend at the GMS Middle School, they learn to adjust to a new and different school pattern from the more traditional Montessori classroom of younger students. Middle School students move from class to class and generally have a different teacher for each core subject.

Middle School may be the first time Montessori students are introduced to percentage-based grades, yet emphasis continues to be placed on experiential work that is evaluated in a more subjective way via teacher observation. The percentage-based grades earned during the Middle School years, especially at the 8th level, may be an important factor in deciding acceptance into private schools or specific magnet school programs. The Middle School faculty helps students transition into the "grades-based" environment present at many non-Montessori schools through a gradual increase in the emphasis placed upon grades from 6th level through 8th level.

The GMS Middle School places a high priority on teaching skills related to time-management, organization and prioritizing. Students who gain and practice these skills at the Middle School level exhibit a higher degree of academic discipline and often experience a smoother transition into high school.

In order to teach and encourage the use of these skills, the GMS Middle School employs the "Get Organized" or GO strategy. GO is comprised of a set of general expectations concerning how a student manages time, organizes work, and prioritizes activities. Skills are introduced and/or reviewed during the first weeks of school. We encourage all students who are new to the Middle School (this includes all 6th level students) to use this strategy during the first trimester. After this initial period, students conference with teachers and develop a more personalized plan based on areas of strength and weakness. Teachers observe the students' implementation of these plans and students evaluate how well these strategies help them to manage time, organize work, and prioritize activities.

The GO expectations are as follows:

- Students will enter buildings and classrooms in a quiet manner, in order not to disturb the work that is taking place.
- Students will be on time for class.
- Students will maintain a binder with all needed supplies and will carry this binder to every class.
- At the beginning of each class students will have the following items on their desks within easy access: work, pencil, binder, planner, textbook (if applicable), and other materials as required by the nature of the work.
- Students will maintain a planner and utilize the assignment web site.

### **Community Standards**

We promote and maintain a positive atmosphere where students, visitors, and staff feel respected, welcome, and safe. This creates an environment where everyone is able to work to the best of his or her

abilities. We expect all students to do their part to maintain our community standards.

If an individual is not respectful of others, unable to follow school rules as stated in the GMS Community Handbook, or disruptive to the educational process, the following steps will be taken: the student will be redirected and the teacher will initial the student's planner. If the problem reoccurs, the teacher will remind the student of the desired behavior and circle the initials in the planner. If the undesired behavior continues, the teacher will mark an "X" over the initials and send the student to the office until the next period. At this time, the parent(s) will be notified. If the undesired behavior continues once the student returns to that day's classes, the student will be sent home for the day. The student and parent(s) must attend a conference the following school morning with the Head of School or Associate Head of School to be allowed to return to the classroom.

We encourage a student who has had difficulties to start fresh the next day, yet if teachers observe that a student continues to be challenged in the area of courteous behavior and a pattern emerges, further conferences may be called.

If a student must leave class due to undesired behavior, the student is still responsible for any work missed and it is the student's responsibility to obtain all necessary resources.

### **Discipline Policy**

Please see the GMS Community Handbook for the school's complete discipline policy.

### **Cell Phones**

We understand that it is sometimes necessary for a student to contact his or her parent. There will always be sufficient phones available for student use if deemed necessary by a teacher or GMS staff member. Under no circumstances are students allowed to have cell phones on campus or at any school-sponsored event for any reason. Any cell phones will be confiscated and kept until such time as the Head of School can meet with the parents directly to return the phone.

### **Dress Code**

Our dress code is designed for two primary reasons: safety and respect of others and the learning environment. Middle School students must keep in mind that they are seen as role models for the younger children, and they represent the school to visitors and the outside community.

The following code applies to all school functions including field trips:

- No spaghetti straps
- Undergarments cannot be visible
- Clothes cannot be distressed: torn, ripped, etc.
- Stomachs must be covered (including when arms are lifted to reach inside lockers)
- T-shirts must not be offensive
- Shorts' and skirts' lengths should reach to the fingertips when the arms are held straight down by the side
- Gray T-shirts, black shorts, and non-marking tennis shoes are required for PE (Students without proper attire will not participate in that day's activities which will affect their overall grade)
- Hats and sunglasses are allowed outside only
- No baggy pants

We strongly recommend that students wear closed toed shoes and all shoes have a back strap on them. Flip-flops are not considered appropriate footwear.

Students who do not meet the dress code requirements will be sent to the office where a staff member will call a parent to bring the student suitable attire. Repeated offenses may result in the student being sent home until the problem can be resolved.

## **Punctuality**

Punctuality is one of the most important practical life skills that students can obtain. In most cases, the business world demands it. Being punctual for the beginning of the school day, as well as, the beginning of each class is important for several reasons.

First, when someone comes into the classroom late, no matter how quiet he or she tries to be, it will be a distraction for those focusing on their work. A student's uninterrupted work-time is highly valued in Montessori education.

Second, the community of learners is also something that is important to our philosophy. When everyone begins work at the same time, the ability to learn and share with others is facilitated. Students weave their ideas together creating an understanding where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

And thirdly, as the oldest members of our Montessori student community, it is every Middle Schoolers' responsibility to be a good role model for the younger students.

We have prepared a morning environment that facilitates the student's transition to school and encourages punctuality. The doors open at 8:00 am and students may go to their Homebase rooms at this time. Homebase officially begins at 8:15 am. We expect students to be in class by this time. A role sheet will be available in each Homebase. Students will be responsible for signing-in to class. The role sheet will be removed at 8:15 am, a final count taken, and any student who arrives after this time will be marked as tardy.

Homebase is a time of preparation for the day. It is an opportunity for students to: gather all materials for their morning classes, participate in community discussions and decision making, speak with teachers and/or peers concerning school work or activities, and turn in any "late" or "missing" work.

## **Attendance**

We recognize that there are times in every student's school life when the student being tardy or absent from school is unavoidable. We also believe that punctuality is an important life skill to be developed, and that absences from school generally detract from the student's learning process and pose additional challenges for the student and the student's school community.

With that in mind, we will address absences and tardiness pursuant to this policy.

Absences and tardiness will be treated as excused when they are for one of the following reasons:

### **Illness**

Unavoidable appointments with a health care provider

Religious Observances

High school visits (8<sup>th</sup> level only)

## Family emergencies

In each instance, parents should contact the school and provide a note (from a health care provider when appropriate) explaining the absence or tardy.

When a student has been tardy or absent, or a combination of both, five (5) unexcused times during the trimester, we will send a note home via email or in writing. If three (3) additional unexcused instances of the student being tardy or absent occur after the note home, parents will be contacted by the front office and a conference between the student (and the student's advisor, where applicable), the student's parents, and the head of school will be scheduled to determine what actions can be taken to reduce absences and being late for school.

We request and strongly recommend that all appointments for health care be scheduled outside of school hours.

With respect to absences due to family trips or outings, or the student's participation in non-school related activities, we recognize that occasionally the timing of such events may be unavoidable. We ask that you keep such absences to a minimum, and that you also do the following:

**Parent's Responsibility:** Notify all of the student's teachers in writing of the absence at least two (2) weeks prior to the absence.

**Student's Responsibility (Elementary and Middle School):** Schedule conferences with each teacher to discuss completion of work that will be missed and its due dates.

Failure to do so may result in work being treated as not being turned in on time.

## **Technology**

We are fortunate to have access to a variety of technologies, including computers, the Internet, overhead projectors, DVD players, etc. We expect students to use these items responsibly and only for schoolwork.

Students are allowed to use the Internet to research class projects and assignments. They are not allowed to use school computers to access e-mail or to do other personal projects. Students are not allowed to change settings, load software, or make adjustments to computers. They are expected to follow the technology rules as discussed by the System Administrator. Students are required to sign a Technology Use Policy.

Students are required to sign in before using a computer and a teacher must be present during study.

Students who do not respect the technology guidelines will receive a Behavior Warning. Students who violate these guidelines repeatedly will lose technology privileges.

## **Parent-Teacher Communication**

Parents drop off students in the morning outside in the parking lot near the Upper Elementary and Middle School building. Doors will be open at 8:00 a.m. The school day begins at 8:15 a.m. Pick up is after school at 3:20 p.m. in the main parking area by the front office.

Parents are able to contact the teacher by voice mail, e-mail (preferred) or send in a note with the student.

General questions should be directed to the student's homebase teacher. Teachers will get in touch with you as soon as possible. If a parent has a concern, he or she should schedule an appointment for a meeting with the teacher(s) involved. Please discuss any concerns with the Middle School faculty directly. The Head of School or Associate Head of School will be involved when necessary. If a conference is needed at any other time during the school year, parents will be contacted by the teacher on a case-by-case basis. Parents may initiate a conference at any time by contacting the Middle School faculty.

### **Contact Information**

GMS Web site            <http://www.thegms.org/>  
GMS Telephone        336- 668- 0119 (Individual extensions listed below)

E-mail address [MiddleSch@thegms.org](mailto:MiddleSch@thegms.org) (preferred address)

**Angie Cook** - *Division Head/Science*  
Ext. 251 - [angie@thegms.org](mailto:angie@thegms.org)

**Kathy Pitney** - *English*  
Ext. 257 - [pitney@thegms.org](mailto:pitney@thegms.org)

**Morgan Kratovil** - *History/P.E.*  
Ext. 255 - [morgan@thegms.org](mailto:morgan@thegms.org)

**Doug Williams** - *Math*  
Ext. 252 - [doug@thegms.org](mailto:doug@thegms.org)

**John Archambault** - *Math*  
Ext. 240 - [jra@thegms.org](mailto:jra@thegms.org)

**Walter Moore** - *Spanish/Permaculture*  
Ext. 253 - [walter@thegms.org](mailto:walter@thegms.org)

**Elizabeth Ramsey** - *Art/Restaurant*  
Ext. 254 - [elizabeth@thegms.org](mailto:elizabeth@thegms.org)

**Jon McLean**  
*Performance & Production/Marketing/Student Council*  
Ext. 259 - [jon@thegms.org](mailto:jon@thegms.org)

**Jo Hiebert** - *Heroic Journey/IT*  
Ext. 264 - [joh@thegms.org](mailto:joh@thegms.org)

### **Extracurricular Programs**

A variety of extracurricular programs are available to Middle School students and may include: basketball, volleyball, cross country, soccer, CASA, and after school clubs.

Students are expected to follow the same guidelines after school as during the school day when participating in an activity affiliated with the school. Students must remember that they are

representatives of the Greensboro Montessori School to the outside community.

### **Fieldtrips**

The Middle School expands the students’ knowledge of the world by bringing special programs and resources, including guest speakers, to the school. Middle School students also go out into the community for first-hand experience. These events are planned in conjunction with the curriculum and therefore are designed to enrich classroom studies.

All fieldtrips are announced in advance and all students must have a signed permission form on file at the school in order to attend the trip.

Occasionally, parents are asked to assist on fieldtrips and teachers are always grateful for the help. Often this means driving and always it means being willing to help with the supervision of the students. Guidelines for chaperones are included in the GMS Community Handbook.

Week long fieldtrips at the end of the school year are by grade level- Charleston, SC for 6th level, Tucson, AZ for 7th level, and Costa Rica for 8th level. Field trip information sessions take place within the first half of the first trimester.

As always, students are expected to be on their best behavior and to follow all guidelines as set forth in the GMS Community Handbook and the GMS Middle School Handbook.

### **Curriculum**

The Middle School curriculum at The Greensboro Montessori School is based upon three fundamental ideas: 1) The mission of the school requires a curriculum to be based on a “prepared environment” which is grounded in developmentally appropriate practice, creative/critical thinking, and a desire that all GMS graduates become responsible, global citizens. 2) Early adolescents are unique and require specialized activities which can support their healthy physical, social, and emotional growth. 3) Effective participation in society is grounded in an ability to place oneself in the universe through interdisciplinary and integrated study of the liberal arts.

## **The Mission of The Greensboro Montessori School and its Middle School**

### **We nurture children**

Development	Prepared Environment	Adult As Guide
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### **to be creative, eager learners**

Take risks, experiment	Multiple approaches, ways of teaching and learning	Interdisciplinary/Integrated Learning
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### **as they discover their full potential**

Metacognition	Spiritual Center	Self-assessment
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**and become responsible, global citizens**

Community Meeting	Ecological Awareness	Respect Diversity/Language/Culture
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The description of curriculum in Montessori philosophy relies on language which refers to a “prepared environment.” At GMS, the adults prepare an environment for learning by assisting students to discover knowledge in ways that are appropriate for their individual and developmental needs. This commitment to “follow the child,” in the words of Maria Montessori, is consistent with research which has shown that effective programs for young adolescents engage them in firsthand experience with subject matter, nurturing their creative growth and natural energy by helping them find constructive ways to make informed, purposeful decisions (Jackson & Davis, 2000). While it might be easier to tell students what they need to know, our faculty chooses to create an atmosphere where the students gain insight into the processes of learning for themselves, guided by adults who have expertise in the pedagogy of content knowledge, are well-informed about cognitive development, and are respectful of their students’ unique characteristics.

Included in the prepared environment are multiple opportunities to engage in academic discourse on various levels. Students meet in large and small groups, design and complete long term projects, participate in Socratic dialogue, attend lectures, and work on individualized assignments designed to help them see how to apply what they learn to their understanding of their own experience and their interpretation of the world. Subject area studies are often integrated in ways that are more typical of real life experience than traditional classroom work and all students are encouraged to consolidate their learning through periodic self-assessment and reflection.

Students who participate in the entire curriculum at GMS have proceeded through a series of prepared environments that are related to each other not only through their consistency with Montessori philosophy and developmentally appropriate practice, but also through their relationship to the mission of the school. At each level, adults model ethical and moral behavior and facilitate students’ learning about responsible citizenship on the planet and in society. By the time our students reach the Middle School, we hope they have begun to develop a personal definition of what it means to be a thoughtful participant in the world at large. Indeed, for most early adolescents, it is their strong desire to understand themselves within the context of the greater world that drives much of their behavior and influences many of their attitudes about learning. It is our hope that students who complete our middle school program see themselves as “responsible, global citizens” who:

- Are intellectually reflective,
- Are in the process of understanding his or her cosmic task and working towards its fulfillment,
- Can effectively deal with society and help to change it for the better,
- Are caring and ethical, and
- Are healthy people.

### **The Transitions/Wellness Experiences**

As young men and women experience the transition from elementary to middle school, their bodies grow and change, they develop new interests, and they move among different peer groups. In addition, they are confronted with many messages from a rapidly changing world via the internet, advertising, and popular

music and media. In order to make appropriate choices, it is critical for them to acquire a robust sense of self through building self esteem, a capacity for making reliable and close relationships, a sense of belonging in a valued group, an ability to inquire thoughtfully with flexibility, and a way of feeling useful to others (Jackson & Davis, 2000, Coe, 2005). It is therefore necessary to include in the prepared environment multiple opportunities to promote healthy social and emotional health. The National Middle School Association recommends that teachers create experiences for students which can provide them with practice in safe settings to develop physically, spiritually, and socially (Erb, 2001).

The middle school faculty provide the following experiences for students to promote healthy transitions toward later adolescents and adulthood:

### **Community Meeting**

A community is a group of people coming together to achieve mutual goals and satisfaction in a spirit of peace and harmony. Community Meeting helps build community. Community Meeting is centered on the students and allows democratic governance over their education and environment (TurningPoints2000). Belonging within a supportive web of relationships motivates young adolescents to make the effort and to take the intellectual risks that produce high-level learning (TurningPoints2000). Community Meeting builds courageous, collaborative leadership and a shared vision that guides decisions (This We Believe in Action).

Some examples of Community Meeting activities might be: affirmations, sharing, making collaborative decisions, problem-solving, student decisions/input in rules/class covenant, current events, current issues that arise which need community discussion, and planning/organizing of events or activities.

### **Advisor/Advisee**

Advisor/Advisee is meant to give students the opportunity to establish an individual relationship of trust with a teacher, who, in providing support and guidance, becomes that student's advocate. This program is designed to "address the [emotional] needs of young adolescents while supporting their academic development" (Erb 65). Having an adult advocate at school fosters resilience, "successful adaptation despite risk and diversity" (Jackson and Davis 143). Advisory groups will meet weekly throughout the school year. There will be several additional opportunities for groups to spend focused time together throughout the year.

### **Restaurant**

The GMS Middle School Restaurant program allows students the opportunity to experiment with the practical life experience of running every aspect of a restaurant; from menu planning to carry out regulations needed to maintain our official sanitation grade. Students are involved in the creation, planning, and problem solving necessary for a successful business. By providing lunch for a large part of the community the students gain a sense of self worth, while also building confidence in their abilities.

### **Ropes Course**

Ropes Courses (also called Ropes Challenge Courses and Challenge Courses) are "artificial mountains". Ropes Courses are engineered structures that are purposefully built for humans to engage their climbing instincts. Ropes Course programs typically involve small groups of participants over an intense period of hours or day, in a series of activities that increase in difficulty and focus on participants' various physical, emotional, social, and intellectual capabilities. Ropes Courses are readily

adaptable to students and/or adults, and a wide variety of cultures, settings, and people with different abilities.

The underlying psychological and educational assumption behind Ropes Courses is that if a person is supported to move out of his/her comfort zone, and has a successful experience, then powerful conditions exist for positive change. This is a "development-by-challenge", "stress-inoculation" or "resilience-building" philosophy. In fact, research has shown a higher increase in self and team development for ropes challenge courses than other outdoor activities.

### **Bullying/Peer Mediation Curriculum**

The purpose of the Bullying/Peer Mediation curriculum is to increase awareness of different types of, and appropriate responses to bullying. This may include, but is not limited to: consequences of bullying, peer mediation, modeling good citizenship, the developmental need to self-advocate, self-assessment with reference to bullying, conflict resolution, and how to deal with conflicts observed. There is a culture around bullying that everyone needs to be aware of. The definition of peer mediation is broad and will be explored through a variety of methods such as: seminars, student workshops, guest speakers, peer mediation training, role-playing, discussions & active dialog during Community Meeting & Advisor/ Advisee.

### **Sixth Week**

Sixth Week is an extension of the GMS Middle School academic curriculum. Due to brain development occurring at this age, adolescents require a “change of pace” every sixth week to reenergize and reinvigorate themselves physically and mentally (*“The Potential of the Adolescent”*, Betsy Coe). Sixth Week is a culmination of the 5-week cycle where reflection, integration of all the disciplines, and application of the curriculum’s content and concepts occurs. It is a time of building community in a different environment and doing real, meaningful work with delayed gratification. It fosters environmental awareness, independence, problem-solving and decision-making skills, critical and creative thinking, and collaboration.

Some examples of Sixth Week activities might be: Land Lab Experience, Community Service, and Fieldtrips (Charleston, Arizona, Costa Rica).

### **The Middle School Cosmic Curriculum**

<i><b>MONTESSORI’S GREAT LESSONS</b></i>		
<b>THE STORY OF THE UNIVERSE THE STORY OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM</b>	<b>THE STORY OF THE EARTH THE STORY OF LIFE</b>	<b>THE STORY OF HUMANS THE STORY OF CIVILIZATIONS</b>
<i><b>GMS Middle School Curriculum</b></i>		
<b>Origins</b>	<b>Survival</b>	<b>Possibilities</b>
<b>What are our origins? Are there any universal rules, laws?</b>	<b>What fundamental needs must be met to survive in this world?</b>	<b>What is next and what is our responsibility to it? Is change necessary?</b>

Since its formulation in the 1940s by Maria Montessori, Cosmic Education has provided a way for students to orient themselves firmly in the universe by relating all subjects to each other and attempting to see the “oneness of all creation” (Duffy & Duffy, 2002). In the elementary curriculum, students are introduced to the Great Lessons which integrate the studies of history and biology, particularly as they are related to geography, physical science, and chemistry and as they are complemented by literature, art, and music.

At the elementary level, students proceed through the Great Lessons assisted by impressionistic charts and timelines. The lessons and supporting materials provide an overview of scientific theories about the origins of the universe, the physical development of the Earth, the evolution of species, and a general history of the fundamental needs of humans through cross-cultural study of civilizations. Younger students are introduced to broad concepts and, as they mature, they research and explore those concepts in greater detail. By the time they reach middle school, students have gained a foundation in many basic facts and theories and have just begun to “awaken” to the wisdom which can come with an understanding of the role of human beings within the universe.

The Middle School Cosmic Curriculum is designed to assist students to draw on their knowledge of the Great Lessons to explore fundamental principles and concepts which form the basis for the study of the liberal arts. The principles and concepts are framed as “essential questions” and are linked in a three-year sequence which fits broadly with the timelines from the elementary curriculum.

The essential questions are also linked to the study of content knowledge in Science, Social Studies, English, Spanish, Mathematics, Art, Performance, and Garden with particular attention to the content included in the North Carolina Course of Study (NCSCOS, 2004). The course descriptions which follow provide a more detailed summary of how the cosmic curriculum and content knowledge are represented by subject area. Specific standards related to any subject are available for viewing. Please ask the classroom teacher for a copy.

## **Science Curriculum**

The GMS Middle School Science curriculum builds upon the Five Great Lessons taught throughout the elementary years. This three-year curriculum was developed using the latest research on how adolescents learn, as well as, the most recent scientific data. It is intended to nurture creativity, love of learning, responsibility and global perspectives.

What does a “creative, eager learner and responsible, global citizen” need to know and be able to do regarding the discipline of Science?

- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens will know about and understand the universe, through direct observation and hands-on experiences when possible. They will have the ability to describe, explain, and predict natural phenomena and can ask, find, or determine answers to questions derived from curiosity about everyday experiences. (Basic ideas.)
- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens will understand the interconnection of all elements contained within the universe. This understanding will include the concept of humans as a fixed aspect of the universe and their role as stewards of the Earth. They will also understand their own physical needs as individuals and how meeting those needs is vital to meeting the needs of the system as a whole. (Connecting.)

- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens are able to evaluate the quality of scientific information on the basis of its source and the methods used to generate it. They are able to read with understanding articles about science in the popular press and to engage in social conversation about the validity of the conclusions. (Evaluating.)
- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens will be familiar with basic scientific processes and principles and will be able to use this information to make personal decisions. They will be able to identify scientific issues underlying national and local decisions, express positions that are scientifically and technologically informed, and engage intelligently in public discourse and debate about such matters. They will have the capacity to pose and evaluate arguments based on evidence and to apply conclusions from such arguments appropriately. (Applying)

The essential questions that we will seek to answer in Science are:

- Origins Year
  - From where did we come?
  - What makes us up? (parts) How do these parts interact?
  - Are there universal rules?
- Survival Year
  - What is life?
  - What does it mean to be human?
- Possibilities Year
  - How do we change our world (for the better or worse)?
  - What is our responsibility to the entire system?

## **Social Studies Curriculum**

The goal of the GMS Middle School Social Studies curriculum is to prepare the student to be an informed, responsible, and global citizen now and in the future. Furthermore, the social studies curriculum is meant to prepare the student for individual work, to sustain life; for active citizenship, to safeguard liberty and justice; for the pursuit of happiness and personal fulfillment. These goals recognize the importance of educating the student to be committed to the ideas and values of our democratic republic and to be able to use knowledge about their community, nation, and world, along with skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem-solving. Students who have these commitments, knowledge, and skills will be the most capable of shaping our democracy.

Students will learn about the past and present from a variety of perspectives: civics, anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology. Students will be required to connect the knowledge they gain from all of the disciplines of social studies. The student will demonstrate an understanding of historical and current events using chronological and spatial thinking and develop historical interpretations and frame questions by collecting and evaluating primary and secondary sources. Current events are used to help the student relate the past to the present, recognize patterns, and hypothesize about the future. This learning leads to a better understanding of the similarities and differences among the diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and racial groups in the world.

The essential questions that we will seek to answer are:

- Origins Year

- What are our origins? How did our society get to the way it is today?
  - What are the different types (forms) of government and their origins?
  - What contributions did ancient civilizations and history have on the origins of American democracy?
  - What are the origins of American democracy? (The origins of our country?)
  - Using the origin of democracy in the United States as an example, can we predict the rise and/or success of democracy in other parts of the world?
  - Has the American democratic system “strayed” too far/not enough from the Founding Fathers’ original intent? Should this be an issue?
- Survival Year
    - What types of mechanisms did the Founding Fathers put in the Constitution to guarantee our continued existence?
    - How does the survival of one group affect the survival of another?
    - Is our history a history of progress? Of survival? Of conquest & imperialism?
    - How was the Civil War a fight for the Union’s (America’s) survival?
    - How did the idea of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion jeopardize Native American cultures, values, and lives?
    - With two or more cultures/groups of people, must the other groups assimilate to the dominant group in order to survive?
    - In order to have a peaceful coexistence (or a strong, stable society), is it better/necessary to assimilate (melting pot) or remain multicultural (salad/stew)?
- Possibilities Year
    - How can/do our fundamental governing laws change with society’s ever-changing values, beliefs, etc.?
    - What does the current political trend in the world (of many countries becoming democracies) mean for the future? Mean for democracy? Mean for the world?
    - Are all technological advancements for the better? Do they benefit some groups of people and hurt others?
    - What will the future be like?
    - How does war affect (shape) culture, society and technology?
    - How far can society go legitimately and effectively in forcing people to do what is good for them?
    - Why does genocide continue to occur?
    - Does the United States or the United Nations have the right or the responsibility to interfere in the internal affairs of foreign countries?
    - Are the possibilities of our knowledge infinite and will they be able to solve the current environmental and potentially catastrophic problems facing our world? *Are the human race’s knowledge and technological advancements unlimited or limited?*”
    - How do technological advancements help a society grow and flourish? How do they hurt a society (or risk their very existence)?

## **Math Curriculum**

The GMS Middle School Math program involves an in-depth study of mathematical and basic geometric concepts. The purpose of the program is to help the students develop an understanding not only of the principles of mathematics and geometry, but also of the relevance and application of mathematics and geometry to their intellectual growth and their everyday lives, as well as to society as a whole. We do this through a comprehensive program of direct instruction, independent practice of computation skills, and

individualized or group practice of problem-solving skills in abstract and practical situations. Our goal is for each child to leave the GMS as a well-rounded Algebra student with an appreciation of the role of numbers in our lives. Because most high school math courses are Algebra-based, we provide each child with a solid foundation in algebraic principles to help them to excel in further study of mathematics and geometry when they leave the GMS.

The curriculum is implemented as follows:

An incoming 6<sup>th</sup> level typically will be on a one to two year pre-algebra course of study. The student will then engage in a one-year study of algebra, which will include an introduction to high school level geometry.

Incoming 6<sup>th</sup> level students who complete a one-year pre-algebra course of study will proceed to a two-year algebra study, which also will include an introduction to geometry. This will allow for in-depth studies of algebraic concepts so that, upon entering high school, those students may take honors level Geometry or honors level Algebra II.

If the mathematics faculty determines that students may require additional accommodations, an individualized program of study will be available.

In order to foster students' development as creative, eager learners and responsible global citizens, and to nurture their interest in and understanding of math and geometry as tools that can be used to better understand and function within the world, we will address and seek to answer the following essential questions:

- Each year:
  - What are the purposes of having an understanding of math concepts?
  - What laws, axioms and conventions govern all numbers and geometric interactions?
  - What methods can be used to solve linear equations and inequalities, and which is the best?
  - How can we use and apply fractions, decimals, and percentages, and how do we decide the best one to use in a particular context?
  - To what extent is math about reoccurring patterns and sequences, and how does it extend beyond them?
  - What purposes do polygons serve in the real world?
  - What are the differences among the measurements of figures and solids?
  - How do the basic operations of algebraic fractions compare to the basic operations of numerical fractions?
  - How are statistics used to help us understand the world in which we live?
- Origins and Survival Years:
  - Did people invent math or was it discovered?
  - How and why did number systems develop?
  - Why is math consistent among different groups of people?
  - How did so many societies come to use base ten?
- Possibilities Year:
  - How can we create a community of mathematicians?
  - How can we use math to determine the probability that particular events will occur?
  - How can linear relationships be used to make predictions and decisions and to analyze problems?

- What might exponents and geometry tell us about other dimensions?
- How can we use math to mark change and to plot a course for the future?

## English Curriculum

The purpose of the GMS Middle School English curriculum is to give all students a solid grounding in the conventions of the English language by incorporating grammar, writing, and literature with all other curricula.

Students focus on grammar and mechanics of the language, including a detailed study of sentence analysis with advanced sentence diagramming. We will reinforce and practice skills such as punctuation, proofreading, and proper grammar usage in all work. Students will also spend time studying etymology of words, with a brief overview of the origins of the English language.

Students will read and be exposed to a variety of literature throughout the course of the three year cycle that will dovetail with each year's theme, and be integrated with other subject areas. There will be specific novels required of each student to read during the year. Literature study is used to help students make connections to others throughout the world and in various time periods. Through these connections, students engage in deep, thoughtful conversations and explore facets of the world they have yet to contemplate.

All students will engage in a more detailed study of descriptive, narrative, and expository writing. Students will also be introduced to persuasive writing and debate (written and oral). We will also spend time working with essay format (as dictated by the new SAT). There will be a variety of opportunities for students to share their writing skills throughout the year. Writing is taught by all teachers, with focus on the type of writing used in each specific field/subject. Students will be given a Style Guide with helpful information about writing at the beginning of the school year. They are expected to keep this style guide throughout their time in the GMS Middle School.

The essential questions we will seek to answer are:

Grammar:

- Why do we need standards/conventions for grammar?
- How does English grammar compare to other world languages?

Writing:

- How can {expository, descriptive, narrative, research, essay, persuasive} writing be useful in "real life"?
- Why is writing important to society? Throughout history?
- How can writing affect people {in other generations (whether living in the present or the future), living in other countries, or different race/religion}?

Literature: *For a complete novel list, please see the classroom teacher.*

- A Modest Proposal – How is the author trying to communicate the horrors of society? Discuss symbolism, irony, and satire. (Read every year)
- Beowulf – What values were held most dear by the author (indicative of the time period)? How can you tell? How is this story different from ones written more recently (in the past 500 years)? (Read every year in history of English unit)

- Origins Year:
  - Animal Farm – How does the book strive to enlighten the world in regards to communism and Marxism?
  - Lord of the Flies – According to the book, where do problems in society originate? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
  - Hound of the Baskervilles – Why must we always look past the obvious?
- Survival Year:
  - Frankenstein – What are the fundamental needs we must have met to survive in this world?
  - Aesop's Fables – Why does the author choose to communicate his message through personification of animals as opposed to using human characters?
  - American Civil War (various novels) - How did the American Civil War affect people of different backgrounds?
- Possibilities Year:
  - Tarzan of the Apes – Do we have a hand in our own fate or is our fate pre-destined?
  - The Diary of a Young Girl – Is there a difference between the “outside self” and an “inside self” (duplicity)?
  - 1984 – Is it in the best interest of an individual to question government?

## Spanish Curriculum

Spanish integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. In the process of second language acquisition, knowledge of the societies and cultures that accompany Spanish is considered to be essential. The courses will promote the understanding and appreciation of Hispano-Iberian cultures. Instruction will center on the development of conversational skills, and grammar structures and vocabulary will be emphasized to enable proficiency in thematic topics. Every effort will be made to create an immersive learning environment. Students will be strongly encouraged to speak Spanish in the classroom.

The essential questions we will seek to answer are:

- Why is it important to be able to understand another language, particularly Spanish? What advantages does it confer to have some degree of bilingualism? (*Why is it good to know more than one language?*)
- How are the language and culture of Spanish-speaking peoples similar to and different from the language and culture of the United States? (*Why does it seem that everyone despises “Americans”?*; *what does it mean to be “American”?*)
- If you found yourself in a place where everyone spoke Spanish, and did not speak or understand English, how would you adapt?
- Do you ever think in a language other than English (or your birth language)?
- How do you know if you have truly <<learned>> the language or aspects of the language (or any other subject)?
- Origins Year
  - Does everyone believe that the universe started in the same way?

- How did other societies come to be? How do they believe they came to be? Who are their heroes and heroines?
- Survival Year
  - What is it like for someone to live in a society that is not like your own? How does one “get by,” communicate, learn to cooperate?
  - What are some daily activities practiced in other lands? How do they compare to your own?
- Possibilities Year
  - How do other cultures and societies view the future?
  - How can knowing another culture help create a more peaceful future?
  - What are the advantages of a society that is linguistically and culturally diverse? Disadvantages?

## **Performance Arts Curriculum**

The Performance Arts curriculum seeks to develop the student’s ability to create, translate, produce, maintain, and further an original idea(s) through the performing arts. Different media is explored laterally while we strive to answer the essential questions in depth. During the course of the three-year cycle, students experience the performing arts through original bands, an original rock opera, and film. Classes begin with practical life tasks such as painting and construction. The practical life tasks are then combined with the basics of media for that year’s theme, such as script/song writing. These basics are covered concurrently with a review of the media’s twentieth century history.

The essential questions we will seek to answer are:

- Origins Year:
  - How do you create an original idea?
  - How do you translate your original idea?
  - How do you produce your original idea?
  - How do you complete/finalize your original idea and move on to the next?
- Survival Year:
  - How do you maintain an original idea?
  - How do you maintain the translation of your original idea?
  - How do you maintain the production of your original idea?
  - How do you create a foundation of maintaining original ideas?
- Possibilities Year:
  - How do you exploit originality or an original idea(s)?
  - How do you push the translation of your original ideas(s) even further?
  - How do you expand the production of your original idea(s)?
  - How do you exploit the possibilities of any maintained foundation/thread of original ideas?

## **Visual Arts Curriculum**

Arts education benefits both student and society. Involving the "whole child" in the arts nurtures the development of intuition, sensitivity, reasoning, imagination, and dexterity. Arts education helps students perceive and think in new ways, opening their minds and supporting the development of a global citizen

(NCSCS, 2000). The arts also nurture a love of learning, responsibility, persistence, and positive risk-taking. ([Critical Links](#), 2002)

The GMS Middle School Visual Arts curriculum interweaves aspects of the Five Great Lessons, concepts and themes from other MS disciplines, and national standards for arts education. The three-year curriculum was developed using the latest research on how adolescents learn. Each year's concepts parallel and relate to each other. The goals, content, instruction, expectations and evaluation methods are tailored to meet the needs and starting point of each individual child and increase in sophistication and complexity each year as the child progresses through the program.

What does a “creative, eager learner and responsible, global citizen” need to know and be able to do regarding the discipline of Visual Arts?

- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens are able to use various types of media to implement images from existing sources and/or their imaginations. They will be able to elaborate on an idea or theme and to apply elements of art and the principles of design to their work. (Basic ideas.)
- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens understand that art is a means of communication and persuasion and a way of interpreting the environment. They will explore the purpose and function of visual arts throughout history and by different cultures. (Connecting.)
- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens are able to evaluate and critique works of visual art based on their knowledge of design principles. They are able to identify connections, and similarities and differences among works of art, as well as speculate on the purpose for creating works of art. (Evaluating.)
- Creative, eager learners and responsible, global citizens are capable of applying their knowledge of the visual arts to a vocation and/or avocation. (Applying)

The essential questions that we will seek to answer are:

- Origins Year
  - How is art an expression of the self?
- Survival Year
  - How is art a reflection of society?
- Possibilities Year
  - How can art be used to change society?

### **Permaculture Garden Curriculum**

The Permaculture curriculum in the Middle School Garden focuses mainly on plant care and general garden maintenance, as well as tasting and observing natural systems. There will also be kitchen days built into the schedule, where dishes will be made from garden produce, as well as other foods that are in season. Specific projects developed in the previous semesters will be considered as well. Additional projects may include pond maintenance, chicken tractor/coop, vegetable garden, surface capture and pollinator garden.

Social and emotional skills will be built upon throughout the course of the gardening program, with an emphasis on group work and collaboration. Furthermore, gardening will be conducted in Spanish whenever possible, allowing the students ample opportunity to improve their conversational skills as well as gain a greater appreciation for the application of bilingual abilities in the real world.

Students will also develop a more cohesive awareness of natural cycles as they occur in the garden. Herein, the development of discrete observational skills (i.e. direction of prevailing winds, subtle and not-so-subtle seasonal changes, the position of the sun and the moon in the sky) will play a fundamental role.

The principles of permaculture will be central to treating the garden as a teaching medium. They include:

1. Minimize tilling of the soil
2. Group plants together into guilds
3. Maximize planting of trees
4. Fill at least 50% of the landscape with edible perennials
5. Each component of the landscape should be multifunctional
6. Water, nutrients and energy should be stored and recycled
7. Integrate structures/technology with living components
8. Create and space zones based upon frequency of use
9. Use of biological/organic pest control is preferred
10. Diversity is the name of the game
11. The garden should foster social interaction

The essential questions we will seek to answer are:

- Do you believe it is important to know how to grow or produce your own food?
- Where does your food come from?
- Would you rather eat a tomato from California or one from your own backyard?
- Can you define or identify a weed or garden pest? What is a weed or garden pest?
- How long could you live on food grown or produced solely within a 100-mile radius of where you live?
- Can you identify the rhythm of the seasons and other natural patterns, weather-related or otherwise?
- What basic needs do humans share with other organisms, such as a fig tree, a duck, an earthworm and a bacterium?
- Are the principles of permaculture new, or just restatements of “common” or traditional knowledge?

### **Physical Education Curriculum**

The purposes of the physical education program are to help the student understand the value of being physically fit and the types of activities that contribute to total fitness; to analyze the relationship between physical activity and nutrition and the cardiovascular system; to demonstrate accuracy skills necessary for a variety of games and sports; and to describe the mechanics of skill performance in a variety of activity settings. The goal is to make the student comfortable in all aspects of heart rate monitoring (knows his/her resting heart rate, training (target) heart rate, and recovery heart rate); demonstrate FIT Guidelines (Frequency, Intensity, and Type); and develop safe exercise practices.

Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to set personal goals, develop an awareness of and respect for diversity, apply basic principles of training, and develop abilities to function in group activities. The

student will participate in a variety of cooperative games and sports. The student will perform a variety of skills necessary to engage in individual, dual, small, and large teams. Students will engage in physical activities that provide for challenge, problem-solving, decision-making, appropriate risk-taking, sportsmanship, and collaborative behaviors.

The essential questions we will seek to answer are:

- Where does physical fitness begin? How do you become physically fit? What does “being healthy” mean?
- Physically and mentally, what can exercise do for me?
- Developmentally, what does my system (body) need?
- What does it require to maintain physical fitness? What does it require to maintain a healthy lifestyle?
- How can (do) you improve your overall fitness? How can you improve certain areas of personal fitness?
- What are my strengths? What are the areas I wish to improve? What are my limitations?

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