

December 18, 2009

# Innovation Zone Application: A Collaboration Between the University of Charleston and Mountaineer Montessori School

*The University of Charleston, in collaboration with Mountaineer Montessori School, submits an application to apply for and establish a public Montessori middle school program to be designated as an innovation zone school.*

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**Information of Applicant:**

Entity Applying for Innovation Zone Designation

- The University of Charleston  
2300 MacCorkle Avenue  
Charleston, WV 25304  
304.357.4773, Education Department

In collaboration with

- Mountaineer Montessori School  
308 20<sup>th</sup> S.E.  
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Charleston, Kanawha County, West Virginia

Ronald Duerring, Ed. D., Superintendent  
200 Elizabeth Street  
Charleston, WV 25311-2119

**Number of Professional Personnel: unknown at time of application**

**Number of Service Personnel: unknown at time of application**

## **Narratives for the Innovation Zone Application:**

- **Project Design**

The University of Charleston in collaboration with the Mountaineer Montessori School is proposing the creation of a new public middle school based on the Montessori education model. An individualized approach, provided in Montessori education, is not generally available in the current public schools, but is a valuable and much-needed choice for our area where socio-economic diversity and varied learning styles and needs are the norm. A public Montessori middle school will allow families to choose a small school for their children's middle school experience. This small size will support improved student achievement because of the school's capacity for control over its programs and staff development, and its ability to closely monitor and support the educational change process.

Private and public Montessori middle school programs have been tried throughout North America. They break out of the traditional practices that hold people back and that fasten them to doing the same things in the same way day after day. Established programs are successful. The Montessori approach provides the perfect model for use in establishing a new middle school in Charleston, WV, Kanawha County, with designation as an Innovation Zone school.

The collaboration of the University and the Mountaineer Montessori School will provide a strong team of educators, parents and community members who are committed to children, the city of Charleston, Kanawha County, the state of West Virginia. The collaborative believes in the effectiveness of the Montessori philosophy for improving student achievement and for developing students' capacities and characters. Kanawha County will benefit by having a small, public Montessori school with a strong professional learning community. A public Montessori middle school will provide options in its program that are not generally available in the current public schools: an individualized learning approach, Montessori curriculum, and mixed-age, multi-year groupings.

A public Montessori middle school will be dedicated to forming productive partnerships within the community to benefit both student learning and the community's resources. Middle school students will interact with community organizations through meaningful project-based curriculum and service learning projects, forming productive and positive relations between city and school. We seek to create a school with permeable borders that will encourage information and skills to come into the school from the community, and go out of the school to the community.

## **Goals and objectives of the project**

The following operating principles of a Montessori learning community can be applied for students ages 12 – 15.

- The school facilitates learning experiences in which students seek contextual studies in the classroom arising from ongoing real life problem solving, social relations, and real world focus;
- The school integrates students' academic work with self-expression, including music, drama, visual arts, poetry, and electronic visual expression;
- Students engage in real social participation in community projects that help to nurture relationships between young and old, including working alongside adults;
- Students commit to real apprenticeship programs and community renewal efforts;
- The school utilizes a variety of teaching methodologies, including didactic modes (lectures, visual aids, textbooks as resources), coaching modes (independent student exploration and study with teacher assisting on the sidelines), and seminar modes (active questioning and interpretation through discussion of primary readings as opposed to textbooks) integrated with all aspects of the curriculum; and
- The school gives students an international perspective to help them become informed about citizenship in their own community and in the world derived from the Montessori integrated approach to the whole of history and humanity and its great work for the future
- Students create and manage a business.

## **Methods and Strategies**

The focus of the educational program is to ensure that all students meet rigorous academic, personal and social achievement objectives. This will be accomplished using a 21<sup>st</sup> century curriculum that effectively aligns, merges, and consolidates the Montessori curriculum with public education that promotes academic excellence. Students will be motivated by the materials, project-based curriculum, and integrated teaching and learning, enabling them to tackle the challenges necessary to become constructive contributors in society.

Student success will be the shared responsibility of the students, their parents and their teachers. All three are essential partners in the quest for academic, personal and social excellence. In partnership with teachers and parents, children attain high levels of academic, personal and social achievement and so prepared, become constructive contributors to our community.

## **Model options for a public Montessori middle school:**

There are two models preferred in establishing Montessori middle schools in an urban or suburban setting.

- 1. Classroom based.** This model is classroom focused, centered on indoor activities that extend the Montessori elementary classroom style. It is usually adopted when a start-up is small (under ten students) without necessarily emphasizing a prepared environment that provides opportunities for meaningful work outside of the school context. The class business is usually in the form of fundraising for a class trip, utilizing bake sales, rummage sales, and collective rent-a-kid enterprises. Landscaping or gardening is sometimes introduced in relation to the school's building and grounds.
- 2. Classroom based with extended going out.** Still operating in the Montessori elementary context, this program emphasizes a variety of key experiences independently programmed to augment classroom work. Going out can include care for the elderly, service in homeless centers and soup kitchens, short studies of communities, limited apprenticeships, or ecological projects such as water or soil testing. However, there is little or no community integration between the different going out programming events, which, more often than not, are simply discrete experiential opportunities inspired by the available cultural institutions or local parks. This is the most frequently chosen model for a Montessori middle school program.

## **Getting Started**

Following are suggestions on how to get started with a public Montessori middle school acquired from consultant, Marta Donahoe, founder of Clark Public Montessori Middle School and High School, Cincinnati, OH. Clark is accredited by the American Montessori Society with an on-site teacher-training program.

- Find two passionate teachers, one who would teach math and science, and the other language arts and social studies;
- Send both teachers for the first five weeks of summer training program, first summer;
- Have the teachers work on the curriculum that school year and send them to the two mid-year retreats in Cincinnati;
- Host parent meetings to build excitement and support for the new program that will open the following school year;
- Teachers take the final two weeks of training during second summer, create handbooks and refine curriculum;
- The second school year would be the year with 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders and the internship year for the teachers. (Even though teachers have made the two requisite trips to Cincinnati the previous year, often teachers decide to come back during the school year to do more observations in Cincinnati.) Clark Public Montessori Middle School and High School web site: [www.CMSTEP.com](http://www.CMSTEP.com).

## **Teacher development**

The middle school will be committed to hiring and sustaining high-quality teachers who have or are pursuing Montessori certification. The school is also committed to enhancing teachers' abilities and leadership through continuous development within a professional learning community. A cornerstone of the school's instructional design will be to develop teachers' professional capacity so the highest standards are understood and are to be perpetuated consistently. Teachers will be given time during the school day to meet and discuss curriculum and assessment with an ongoing focus on accountability for student success.

## **Use of specialists in the Montessori Adolescent Program**

For the adolescent program, a specialist is an adult who helps the adolescent mature through possessing real life skills and an inspiring role in society. The specialist demonstrates what it means to be competent, confident, and immersed in a life work that to some degree helps define how a positive identity forms. The adolescent program considers each community adult who acts as a specialist to be a mentor who takes special interest in the student, allowing the student to share in real responsibilities and actual decision-making. The student is initiated into the adult community through this mentoring relationship with the specialists who participate in the program.

The specialist should be distinguished from the specialty teachers of art, music, and physical education. At the adolescent level, for the cost of one full-time specialty teacher- a school could get a variety of artists, musicians, dancers, and athletes coming to work one day weekly for six weeks each, offering different artistic skills or appreciation courses. In this way, the young adolescents can experience a wide range of specialists, many of whom may match individual students' personalities and inspire career interests for life. The discriminating use of external specialists, as opposed to in-house specialty teachers, is a very different approach for the adolescent.

## **Program Size and Viability**

A comfortable program size is between thirty and forty students at the maturity of a three-year span. The school requires separate publicity and a unique admissions process. The program will admit students from the Montessori school's population as well as invite applicants from the public sector to reach the desired enrollment.

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## **Educational Syllabus**

The focus of the syllabus will integrate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills as per the Innovation Zones Policy 3236 §126-75-4. Focus of Innovation Zones, Article 4.1.1 "...Thinking and Problem-solving; Information/Communication Processing; Personal and Workplace Productivity Skills; Creativity and Innovation Skills' Student Self-Direction." The context within which these skills will be integrated includes the following:

1. Intellectual and emotional development: mathematics, language, character education,
2. Self-expression: music, art, language
3. Preparation for adult life
  - a. The study of the earth and living things (geology, geography including prehistoric periods, biology, cosmology, botany, zoology, physiology, astronomy, and comparative anatomy)
  - b. The study of human progress and the building up of civilization (physics, chemistry, mechanics, engineering, and genetics integrated into the history of science and technology)
  - c. The study of the history of humanity (scientific discoveries, geographical explorations, environment and contact between different peoples, war, religion, patriotism, a detailed study of one period, biography, the present day and nation, law, literature, and government)

### **• Research Base**

The "Third Plane of Development," adolescence (ages twelve to eighteen), has been in the Montessori literature since the 1920s; in fact, government-sponsored junior high and high schools (called "Lycea") sprang up in The Netherlands in Dr. Montessori's name around that time, albeit without her supervision. Many of these schools still exist. The advent of Montessori secondary education in the United States began in the early 1970s as an extension of the elementary approach, usually entailing a classroom-based seventh and eighth grade.

In 2007 in North America, nearly four hundred, almost two fifths of the more than one thousand Montessori elementary programs, had new or developing middle school programs covering ages twelve to fourteen. Most recently, programs are considering a three-year age range.

Montessori education commits to preparing students to be constructive contributors in our community by focusing on academic, personal and social development. Therefore, the learning environment of a newly established public Montessori middle school will be based on the Montessori philosophy because of its emphasis on the development of the whole child. The philosophy recognizes that children have a desire to learn and, given the proper environment, they develop intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically. This "prepared environment," as Dr. Montessori called it, includes not only the classroom and materials, but also the social setting or atmosphere. It is imperative that all these things support the child.

Furthermore, the Montessori philosophy, initially developed for underprivileged children, specifically addresses the diversity in our community by providing a child-centered, individualized approach to teaching and learning. The Montessori educational approach addresses the community's diversity to ensure that "no child is left behind." Research focusing on children of low socio-economic status shows that Montessori education has resulted in high levels of academic and personal achievement.

- **Policies of Code that Prohibit or Constrain the Design:**

Resources and funding for this project are potential constraints which will be more fully explored in the event that this application is approved.

**Documents required from Institutions of Higher Education:**

December 18, 2009

**TO: West Virginia Department of Education**  
**RE: Application for Innovation Zone School**  
**FROM: University of Charleston and Mountaineer Montessori School**

Verbal approval of the University of Charleston/Mountaineer Montessori School application as an Innovation Zone was provided on behalf of the Kanawha County Board of Education by Dr. Ron Duerring, Superintendent of Kanawha County Schools, on Dec. 14, 2009.

The University plans to work with Mountaineer Montessori School personnel to establish more formal protocols to address:

- a. required reporting on student attendance.
- b. reporting academic progress and other matters relating to administration, operation and support of the school and agreed to by the institution and the board or boards
- c. establishing agreements on the participation of students enrolled in the Innovation Zone school in the curricular or extracurricular activities at the county school in which they are enrolled
- d. establishing agreement between the state institution of higher education and participating county board or boards of education to meet the accountability requirements for student assessment under all applicable assessment programs administered by the West Virginia Department of Education and provisions of law or policy required by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law No. 107-110 or other federal law

Sincerely,



Dr. Ron Duerring, Supt. of Schools, Kanawha County

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Dr. Edwin Welch, President, University of Charleston

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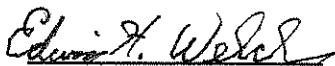
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**Sincerely,**



**Dr. Ron Duerring, Supt. of Schools, Kanawha County**



**Dr. Edwin Welch, President, University of Charleston**