**DRAFT**

**Characteristics of an American Montessori Society Secondary Program**

An AMS Secondary Program for middle and/or high school students is based upon Maria Montessori’s writings and philosophy. While Dr. Montessori clearly articulated a curriculum for Montessori Infant & Toddler, Early Childhood, and Elementary age groups, she left only general guidelines for Montessori Secondary programs, writing of the need for secondary school reform that addressed the unique developmental characteristics of 12-18 year olds. Her theories supported establishing a prepared learning environment for adolescents that integrates rigorous, student-centered academic studies with purposeful work that prepares them to become contributing adult-citizens who are equipped with self-confidence and the skills needed to thrive in society.

Dr. Montessori never intended for the secondary program to stand-alone. Rather, it is intended for students with previous Montessori experience over a three-year cycle (3-6 years, 6-9 years, and/or 9-12 years). Ideally Secondary programs will grow from Montessori Elementary programs so that the majority of Secondary students have previous Montessori experience over a 3-year cycle. When there are openings, new students may be considered, provided that they make up no more than 25% of the students within a classroom.

**Developmental Characteristics of the Adolescent (12 - 18 years of age)**

A Montessori Secondary program is designed to address the needs of students who are entering a new plane of development characterized by construction of the social self, self-concern and self-assessment, critical thinking, and the construction of social and moral values.

During this period, the child develops the following developmentally-appropriate characteristics:

* Adolescents experience a period of tremendous physical growth and puberty, sexual maturation, and boundless energy.
* Emotionally, they experience self-awareness and self-criticism, emotional ups and downs, uncertainty, vulnerability (self-doubt and hesitation), argumentativeness, and ego-centrism.
* Socially, they seek solidarity with their peers, they are critical of peers & adults, they crave increasing independence. They are concerned with human welfare and dignity, and are moral and ethical.
* Behaviorally, they exhibit novelty-seeking and risk-taking behaviors and seek intensity and excitement as a result of their under-developed pre-frontal lobe (which controls impulses and emotions). They exhibit an increased desire for autonomy, an increased interest in “group-think”, and susceptibility to peer pressure. Adolescents benefit from positive bonds with non-parental adults they can trust.
* Cognitively, adolescents are critical thinkers, they question the “why”, they are creative and have a greater ability to reason, and they are capable of mature thought if framed in a personal context.

**Key features of a Montessori Secondary Program**

**a. The classroom environment** is characterized by a student-centered, constructivist approach that enables adolescents to manage time, exercise choice, organize themselves, and practice self-regulation and reflection within the group context. The adolescent community is a mini-society of adolescents and teachers in which adult relationships are nurtured. In Secondary programs with two core academic teachers, instructors are recommended to teach no more than 50 younger adolescents in a community; in high school models with four core academic teachers, instructors should teach no more than 100 adolescents to optimize a sense of community. This adult- to- adolescent ratio supports the creation of a mini-society within the adolescent program and optimizes a sense of community. It is recommended that programs with one teacher should have no fewer than 7 students and should be working to grow to no more than 20/25.

**b.** The classroom structure allows for **uninterrupted work** **periods** in each core curricular subject (math, English, social studies and sciences) that honors student choice and fosters concentration; ideally, these work periods are no less than 120 minutes in length. The classroom structure also allows for **multi-age groupings** in all core curricular classes. Secondary students may be grouped in 2- or 3-year age groupings as follows: ages 12-14, 14–16, 16–18 (grades 7–8, 9–10, 11–12) or ages 12-15, 15–18 (grades 7–9, 10–12).

**c.** Adolescent communities are respectful and allow opportunities for collaborative work and student leadership as exhibited by:

* daily student-led community meetings
* a community of learners engaged in collaborative work
* activities, such as Socratic discourse, inquiry-based problem solving, and applied scientific method, that encourage diversity of perspectives, thoughts, and learning styles
* compassionate and respectful interactions
* a just society for all; evidenced by grace and courtesy

**d.** Montessori Adolescent programs promote responsible and ethical **use of technology**, with the majority of the school day spent in learning activities and practices that require peer-to-peer and student-teacher interaction.

**Curriculum Areas**

Maria Montessori wrote that Montessori adolescent programs should be rooted in work of the hands and heart, as well as work of the head. Especially for 12-14 year-olds, a Montessori curriculum is rooted in “Erdkinder”, a German word meaning “Earth Children”. As important as the intellectual work of academics, the Secondary curriculum includes activities in nature (e.g. farming, gardening, physical work) that are directly tied to their hearts and hands. It is recommended that the Secondary Montessori curriculum include a minimum of ten days of field study per year, which may be delivered via 2 5-day intersessions.

The Montessori spiral curriculum is designed to expose students to many interrelated topics repeatedly over time. The Montessori Secondary program continues and expands upon the learning that has been fostered in Elementary programs and includes core curricular courses of language arts, mathematics, sciences, and social studies that are cognitively challenging in scope. Additionally, students take world language courses, visual and performing arts, health, fitness, and other elective courses, and participate in field studies linked to themes, academic work, and service learning. Executive functioning exercises such as the use of checklists, work plans, planning calendars, and/or study guides promote the development of time management, organization, and decision-making skills,

Secondary students engage in projects that integrate core curricular areas and electives courses, including a Senior Thesis project that is a culmination of learning and includes research and a presentation on a topic of the student’s choosing.

The Secondary curriculum is characterized by curricular interconnections:

* studies and lessons that build upon the Montessori Early Childhood & Elementary curriculum
* opportunities such as field studies and out-of-classroom excursions to cultivate global citizenship
* a micro-community within the classroom that allows students opportunities to participate in a classroom government, and experience other opportunities for leadership
* studies and lessons that engender a sense of hope in the progress and potential of the human spirit
* experiences in nature that cultivate awe and wonder
* micro-economic experiences such as running a business or selling produce in a farmer’s market in which students gain a genuine understanding of money
* field work that may include land labs/camping, internships, community service, entrepreneurship, and outdoor education trips

The Montessori Secondary curriculum emphasizes the nobility of work—that is, meaningful work done with humanity and purpose. The curriculum allows for differentiation and choice, supports engagement and focus on all work tasks, and promotes mastery learning. Lessons and activities encourage active engagement, questioning and dialogue, and students use self-evaluations and rubrics to reflect on and self-assess their learning.

**Role of the Teacher at the Secondary Level**

Trained Montessori teachers have completed a highly-specialized course of training and are viewed as facilitators and guides, than as “traditional” teachers who provide direct instruction. Procedures and practices for fully implementing a Montessori Secondary program are specifically taught to adult learners in Montessori teacher education programs for that program level and are further developed by the teachers during and after the completion of training, so that each Secondary program individualizes based upon the program location, the school culture, and the needs of the adolescents.

Montessori Secondary programs should have lead teaching faculty in the core curricular subjects of math, English, social studies and sciences who hold (or are in the process of earning) a Montessori Secondary credential. (AMS accepts teaching credentials from teacher education programs affiliated with AMS, NCME, or AMI, or accredited by MACTE, though currently AMS is the only organization that offers a Montessori Secondary teaching credential.)

The Montessori Secondary teacher fosters teacher/student/peer interactions that exhibit respect, grace and courtesy. Additionally, the teacher:

* serves as an inspiring role model
* recognizes and supports the development of positive qualities in the adolescent by maintaining a vision of what students can become, and providing support and encouragement for each student to achieve his or her full potential
* observes and responds to adolescent needs of leadership, movement, creativity, problem-solving, responsibility, independence, and autonomy
* demonstrates mastery of curriculum content by providing whole group lessons, mini lessons, and individual coaching to students
* creates work that helps students synthesize learning
* fosters and supports cooperation and collaboration within the adolescent community
* assists the adolescent in finding her/his place in society

**Role of the Family at the Secondary Level**

As an adolescent matures, his/her family supports the student and the Montessori Secondary program by exemplifying the following characteristics: allowing for the healthy development of a unique identity and belief system, setting and maintaining firm and reasonable limits and enforcing them consistently, encouraging the development of interdependence.

**Research to Support Montessori Secondary Programs**

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**References**

*AMS* *School Accreditation Standards and Criteria:*  See www.amshq.org > AMS School Accreditation

*AMS Montessori Uninterrupted Work Period:* See www.amshq.org > School Materials

*AMS* *Suggested Materials Lists*: See www.amshq.org > School Resources > Classroom Materials

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