

We all have our own story about the journey, and ultimately the decision to join The Montessori School. The journey is unique to each family. For some, the thought of a Montessori education for your child might surface during casual conversation with a friend or neighbor as you observe their young Montessori child greeting others with a handshake, and making eye contact. Or perhaps, after observing your child's first steps, quickly prompting a "Pre-school" Google search, where "Montessori" is listed. Or, as in my family's case, a family connection to Montessori education. Whichever path your family travelled, as you know, the decision to enroll your child at The Montessori School was, and remains the most important decision you will ever make for your child's/children's development.

Our family of five Montessori School educated children (four graduates/one current Middle Schooler) each entered The Montessori School at the Primary level. In the beginning, our educational focus was on adaptation and integration: Are they behaving? Are they happy? Are they making friends? After our first Primary conferences with Alex, our oldest and now 22, we knew there was more to the Primary program than clever materials and multi-age socialization. The depth and breadth of the conferences were immediately impressive. Alex's assessment went beyond basic learning skills evaluation, and covered how he was learning, his adaptation and emotional/behavioral development. In his second Primary year, we asked what many Primary parents ask: What's next? Montessori and the materials fit perfectly with the primary ages, but what about the next stage of elementary education, when more complex subjects are introduced? What about the five-paragraph essay and computers? I wanted to learn more about the Lower and Upper Elementary program as well as what other private schools offered in order to make the best education decision for Alex, and hopefully his siblings. Lower Fairfield County offers many highly rated public and private school choices, and the private elementary schools presented very strong cases for careful consideration of their programs.

The Montessori School offered us several opportunities to observe each Lower and Upper Elementary class. We settled into our slightly larger than Primary, but still small chairs and observed. After receiving my freshly made tea from a second year Lower El student, I observed much of what I had observed in Primary: intelligently planned classroom spaces, brilliantly designed materials, engaged students, and an active, yet calm classroom led by a highly trained Directress and Assistant in complete harmony. Rather than the one dimensionality we observed in a traditional elementary classroom, the Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary classes were multi-faceted and a community. The multi-age classes, growing student independence, challenging work, and opportunities for leadership within and across classes were and remain impressive. The same was true for the Upper Elementary observations, (and several years later at the newly formed Middle School.) Ultimately, the decision to enroll all five children in Lower and Upper Elementary and later Middle School, for us, was a confirmation of what we based our decision on to first enroll our children in Primary.

Alex's early passion for math accelerated beyond our expectations at The Montessori School. Lower and Upper Elementary provided Alex with an opportunity to become immersed in math work, whether working individually or in groups. In his third year of Upper Elementary, Alex was challenged to compete with another equally, math-passionate student as to who would finish the Upper El math materials first. Alex's ability to focus on math work based on his drive (but not at the total expense of other work) and not limited to "45 minute periods four times a week" as dictated by a typical school schedule, was key to his development. His deep interest in math continued through Middle School, where Mrs. Krulwich's classroom instruction and inspiration further fueled his passion, and in high school at the Kent School, a boarding school in Kent CT. His quantitative ability was one of the main reasons Alex received a scholarship to Santa Clara University.

Our children greatly benefited from the Montessori classroom, teachers and community, be it Kathleen, aged 20, pursuing a degree in Behavioral Biology and Global Environmental Change and Sustainability at Johns Hopkins University, or Lauren aged 18, also at Johns Hopkins, studying International Political Science and Languages, or Debra, a Sophomore at Hopkins School, New Haven, enrolled in accelerated math and science classes, while co-captain of the JV Soccer team. Sara, will complete her Montessori School education and graduate from the Middle School this spring. Her graduation will mark *twenty years* since Alex first stepped into Margherita Shaw's Primary classroom and commencing our family's journey at The Montessori School. We are deeply grateful for the education and formation of our children, and the many friends we have made in partnership with The Montessori School.