



MIDDLE SCHOOL AT FSMA

A superior curriculum carefully designed
to prepare children for high school,
college and life



I can think of no better way to prepare today's young adolescents for any upcoming high school experience, public or private. I have had administrators from high schools meet me and thank me for sending them such prepared, responsible, and respectful students. It isn't me doing that work in isolation, however, it is the Montessori Adolescent program.

A Montessori Middle School Teacher

From our parents past and present...

My daughter, who never really wants to appear too excited about anything... comes home in the afternoon absolutely bubbling over. She's excited about what she's learning and talks a lot about how much she enjoys her classes. She can't say enough about great her teachers are – she feels like they are totally relatable and that they just “get” how to teach and guide kids her age. She appreciates her classmates and the overall environment that you all are creating. She loves the format changes that 7th grade has brought and feels like everything is really well organized. Most importantly, she feels that she is getting what she needs to be successful (especially in math, which has always been her difficult subject).

My dear daughter, who used to say “You know, it's school” when asked how things are going, is now declaring “I LOVE SCHOOL!! I see her confidence building, her organizational skills developing and she feels a real ownership in her education. This, quite honestly, is huge – and as a parent, I have to say THANK YOU. It's middle school – she'll have her ups and downs like all kids – but please know that what you do every day in those classrooms makes a huge difference in the lives of the students you teach.

Recently, my son said to me, “I think Montessori really prepared me for high school” As I sat back and thought about this, I completely agree with him but more so, I think FSMA really prepared him for high school. He not only has the academic skills to be taking honors classes (from a student who needed extra support when he started there 5 years ago) but he has the skills to walk into a completely new environment, find a community and navigate every step with little help from us.

So here we are starting into week 3 of high school and I'm sitting here looking at my happy and well-adjusted daughter. While not every day has been totally smooth sailing, she has absolutely had the skills she needed to navigate the uncertainty and advocate for herself. The coursework is no problem so far - and the binder/cycle method you use in Middle School has her unbelievably organized and on top of every class. I just had to say thank you to all of you and don't be surprised if high schools are banging down the doors to get FSMA students!

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Welcome to FSMA Middle School!

Thank you for choosing to be a part of the First State Montessori Academy community. This handbook provides information about our community, and the details and expectations of being a part of our Middle School Program. Additional School-Wide Information can be found in our Family Handbook.

Surviving and Thriving in the Middle School Years

As many of you are already feeling, Middle School is a time of increasing independence. Knowing just how much latitude to give your child is one of the trickiest parts of parenting. And, each time you think you have achieved just exactly the right balance of latitude and limits, your child will suddenly be ready for the next state, and you have to figure it out all over again. As teachers, we are your partners encouraging your children to always give their best effort, to take reasonable risks as part of developing independence, and to be kind to one another in the process.

Middle School is a time when children begin to see the world in more complex ways. Both classroom and dinner table conversations become more intellectual and exciting. Your child may begin to notice that not every family operates the way your family does, that friends have different political or religious beliefs, or that families have different approaches to chores or vacations. At the same time that children are discovering differences, they are also hyper-focused on belonging.

A sense of belonging is an important part of being an adolescent. This focus can be expressed in a variety of positive ways – like being a part of a school team, a musical group, student leadership or even smaller groups that join together for certain projects. There will inevitably also be times during the next few years when your child feels left out. Learning to deal with disappointment and developing a sensitivity to actions that may hurt the feelings of others, is also a big part of the learning process during these years.

Statement of Inclusivity

FSMA is a community of learners who value, and are themselves strengthened by, the diversity of its members. In order to prepare students for living and leading in a diverse and complex world, all people – students, families, staff and board members – will conduct themselves in a way that is not only inclusive but honors and respects the differences we may have based on, but not limited to race, ethnicity, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, mental or physical disability, family structure, and economic background.

Integrity, Respect and Responsibility

The classroom is based on the premise of integrity, respect, and responsibility. The Montessori classroom provides many opportunities at all levels for the development of these universal values. Integrity involves trust and honesty. The Middle School begins each year with activities for the students and teachers to learn to trust each other, including a team building field trip. Learning to trust oneself, peers and adults is the first step in establishing a community of learners. Trust is an important factor in early adolescent development. Honesty in personal relationships and academic work is a cornerstone of the classroom rules.

Students are expected to treat themselves with respect, treat each other with respect, and respect the materials in the environment. Specifically, grace and courtesy lessons are part of the classroom learning and are discussed and practiced. Everyone in the environment needs to experience affirmation. The books and materials in the environment will need to be treated with care. Most textbooks and learning materials belong to the school and must remain in good condition so others can use them.

There are two kinds of responsibility: The first is taking responsibility for one's needs in the learning environment – such as learning time-management, completion of homework on time, focus, physical organization, and problem solving. The second is taking care of the needs of others and contributing to the group. This involves supporting others, working cooperatively, active listening, and self-management in groups. All of these are important aspects in establishing a classroom community.

FSMA Middle School Curriculum Overview

The environment for the adolescent is created around the idea that students in FSMA's middle school program will develop themselves socially, intellectually, physically and emotionally. Extensive effort is placed on initiating the adolescent into the world of adult work. Students at the 7th and 8th grade level are in a stage of life where they are questioning who they are, how they fit into society and what value they can bring to society. With this in mind, engagement of students in field studies, in-class research, projects, and service learning are as integral to their development as are lessons in the core curriculum. Teachers work together with students to develop an adolescent community that will help students grow and enhance personal qualities of joy, selflessness, optimism, confidence, dignity, independence, self-discipline and collaboration.

“Adolescence is the time when a person should develop the most noble characteristics that would prepare them to be social: A sense of justice and a sense of personal dignity.”

- Dr. Maria Montessori



Sample Student Schedule:

8:20 – 8:40 Arrival

8:45– 9:00 Morning Meeting

9:00 – 10:20 Block 1

10:25 – 11:45 Block 2

11:45– 12:20 Lunch

12:20 – 1:00 Elective 1

1:00 – 2:30 Block 3

2:35 – 3:15 Elective 2

3:25 – Dismissal



*Students have 3 blocks each day

- 1 Block is Math or Science (alternating days)
- 2 Blocks are for ELA/SS Independent Work

*Electives are 3 days/week during the other days, students have additional lessons, work time, group activities, etc.

Middle School Program Components:

Integrated Language Arts/Social Studies Work Period

Math Course - Ability Level Groups

Courses: 7th Grade Math, Pre-Algebra, 8th Grade Math, Algebra, Geometry

Science Course

7th and 8th Grade Science includes: Physical Science/ Life Science/ Earth and Space Sciences/ Engineering, Technology and Applications of Science

Health / Physical Education - Students are required to take one trimester of Health/PE each year as an elective.

Electives: Agricultural-Science, Instrumental Workshop, Chorus, Yearbook, French, American Sign Language, Yoga and Mindfulness, Ceramics, STEM, Drawing, Leadership, Practical Life, Music Production, Music Composition, Creative Writing, Drama, Songwriting, Bay Ecology, Early Childhood, Painting, Ukulele, etc.

Other Components include:

- Personal World
 - 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
 - Learning about Yourself
- Service Learning Project
- Micro-Economics: Running a Business
- Practical Life Activities/Field Trips

Themes/Cycles

Each year there are five designated cycles of work. At the beginning of each cycle students receive study guides identifying the work they are going to accomplish during the cycle. Cycle work includes personal and group assignments with activities. The cycle format is designed to help students learn organizational, decision-making, and time management skills.

FSMA's Middle School Curriculum incorporates four core curriculum areas, aligning to the Common Core State Standards and the State of Delaware Curriculum, as well as field experiences, service learning and personal learning. The four core subjects are taught around the concept of themes. The themes provide a way to integrate different subject areas and make learning relevant to the adolescent. Looking at concepts and ideas through a lens of a bigger picture allows students to create meaning and pique their curiosity, thereby drawing students into their work instead of learning facts and skills in isolated silos of understanding.

Year A - Cycle 1: Connections - Study of Native Americans

Cycle 2: Exploration and Perspectives - Study of Explorers and Reasons

Cycle 3: Identity - Study of Immigration

Cycle 4: Systems - Study of Economics and Economic Systems

Cycle 5: Interdependence - Study of Ecology and Future Visions

Year B - Cycle 1: Forces – Study of Revolutions and their Impact on our World

Cycle 2: Structures – Study of Governments

Cycle 3: Power – Study of Social Justice and Human Rights

Cycle 4: Changes – Study of Inventions and their Impact on Society

Cycle 5: Balance – Study of Peace Education

Social Studies

Social Studies encompasses the Delaware Social Studies Standards and is organized over the course of a student's two years in 7th and 8th grade. Using the academic themes as springboards, the topics of Geography, Economics, Civics and History are all explored through the specific lens of the thematic cycle.

Civics

- Government - How governments make, enforce and interpret laws, federal, state and local governments and the reasons for different political structures
- Politics – The American Political system and important political documents
- Citizenship – Participation and responsibilities of being a citizen, elected officials

Economics

- Microeconomics – supply and demand
- Macroeconomics – banking and money, how taxes and spending affect the function of an economic system
- Economic Systems – production/distribution/exchange and how it affects resources, cultural values and technologies
- International Trade – Interdependence of nations through trade and the impact of free and restricted trade

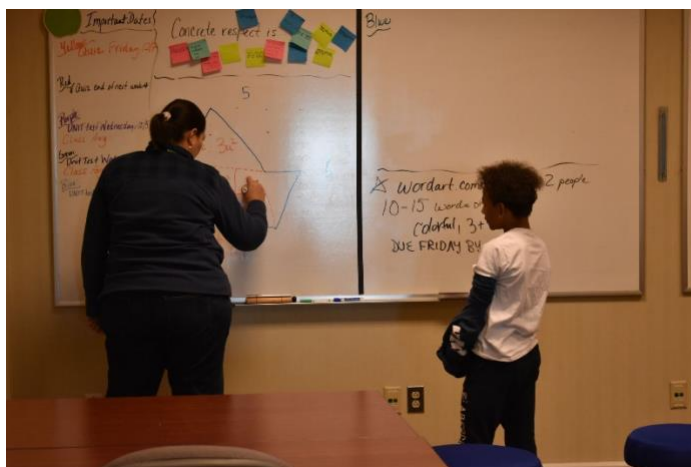
Geography

- Environment – the processes shaping the environment and how cultures are impacted by the environment
- Places – Analyze cultural activity of world regions to explain development, explain cultural and physical characteristics, patterns of trade and interaction that makes it unique
- Regions – how location affects economic activities, the effect people have on the division of political and cultural regions



History

- Pre-Industrial US history and its connections to Delaware history
- Chronology – Analyze historical phenomena looking at change over time
- Analysis – utilize research skills to investigate historical phenomena
- Interpretation – Examine how different sources affect a historian's conclusion



Mathematics

In 7th and 8th grade we are using a curriculum called CMP (Connected Mathematics Project). CMP is a problem centered curriculum which promotes an inquiry based classroom. Common Core State Standards and the Standards for Mathematical Practice are incorporated into the problems. Students will be placed into a math level based on prior completion and ability.

Grade 7: Curriculum – Topics include: Two-Dimensional Geometry/ Integers and Rational Numbers/ Understanding Similarity/ Ratios, Rates, and Proportions/ Linear Relationships/ Three-Dimensional Measurement/ Making Comparisons and Predictions/ Probability and Expected Value

Grade 8: Curriculum – Topics include: Linear Functions/ The Pythagorean Theory / Exponential Rules and Functions / Symmetry and Transformation / Symbols in Math

Algebra I: Curriculum - Includes all topics of 8th Grade Curriculum and additionally covers Quadratic Functions / Systems of Equations and Inequalities / Families of Functions

Geometry: Curriculum - Tools and Notation of Geometry / Constructions / Transformations / Reasoning and Proofs / Proofs in Lines and Angles/ Congruency/ Proofs in Triangles/ Proofs in Quadrilaterals

Science

Science at FSMA is investigation based and students use anchoring phenomena to guide their own discoveries through experimentation and project work. The Science curriculum at FSMA follows the Next Generation and Delaware Science Standards. Students span the topics of life sciences, physical science, earth and space sciences, and engineering, technology and their applications. The science curriculum is enhanced by FSMA's innovative science and engineering lab, where students can learn concepts using a hands-on approach, allowing them to develop, test and adapt theories. As with the other subjects, the progression of the curriculum is organized by the curricular themes but will cover:

Physical Science (Structure and Properties of Matter/ Chemical Reactions/ Forces and Interaction /Energy, Waves and Electromagnetic Radiation)

Life Science (Structure, Function and Information Processing/ Matter and Energy in Organisms and Ecosystems, Interdependent Relationships in Ecosystems / Growth, Development and Reproduction in Organisms / Natural Selection and Adaptations)

Earth and Space Sciences (Space Systems / History of Earth / Earth's Systems Weather and Climate / Human Impacts)

Engineering, Technology and Applications of Science (Engineering Design)



My Own Science (MOS)

Each child completes an MOS Project each cycle. Science is such a huge umbrella that covers many topics, so MOS is your chance to explore a topic of particular interest to you. 50 MOS points are available each Cycle. As a guideline, students should be aiming to spend around 2-3 hours per cycle on their MOS project.

Language Arts

Language arts at the 7th and 8th grade level follows the curricular themes as topics of study. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are integrated throughout so that students can explore the themes deeply. Students read a wide variety of literature including novels, short stories, articles, poetry. This includes assigned texts as well as those of their choosing. Discussion plays a large role, with literature groups meeting to talk about their novel and Socratic circles happening at least once each cycle.

Writing experiences happen daily, and include responses to literature, thought journals, narratives, and research writing. As a way to develop their critical thinking skills, writing is closely tied to reading and exploration in other content areas, with development in explanatory, persuasive, analytical and expressive styles. Projects, field experiences, and service learning also provide avenues for writing, with students being required to produce a major integrated project during each themed cycle.



Along with reading and published writing, adolescents will have the opportunity to develop their vocabulary and grammar/usage through skill work geared towards the standards as well as students specific needs.

Additional Curriculum Components:

Personal World

Students in middle school at FSMA have a unique opportunity to build and live among a strong community of adolescents and adults who will help them to develop themselves personally, socially, emotionally. As adolescents are changing dramatically, they need a sense of belonging to their community and are constantly wondering “How do I fit in?” Through the execution of daily community meetings, students learn many life skills, such as where they fit within the group, how to voice their thoughts and opinions respectfully, how to meet their own needs as well as the needs of others in the group, how to care for and strengthen their community, among many others.

Students have personal reflection time throughout the week. Dr. Montessori felt that early adolescents have a quest for self-knowledge, which in turn helps adolescents develop their identity. In today’s world, students often have not learned to spend time reflecting upon goals, reducing stress, or creating a personal vision. During Personal Reflection, students will work by themselves on guided self-knowledge activities. An example of one resource used is a study of *7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*.

Another aspect to a student’s personal journey is called the Heroic Journey. This is a program whereby adolescents discover how they become responsible to themselves and each other by developing strategies to deal with the trials that invariably arise during adolescence, and how to use the guidance offered by others and how to achieve a challenging personal goal. This culminates with a coming of age ceremony where students have the opportunity to show the broader community that they are growing up and are ready for the next phase of life.

Service Learning/Field Studies

An integral facet of FSMA's middle school program includes the field study and service learning component. Opportunities for giving back to the community or participating in a field study will be determined and planned by the students with guidance from the teachers.

Service learning will be comprised of differing opportunities to give back to the school as a service internship, to the city to better the community environment, or to neighboring organizations.

Mastery Learning

The Middle School Curriculum is based on mastery learning. Mastery learning is a form of personalized learning that gives students the necessary time to master particular skills before progressing to the next level of work. The student takes on the responsibility of learning a skill versus just accepting a low grade and never really learning the information. The teacher's job is to break down the learning steps, to offer suggestions for internalizing the knowledge, and to give the time necessary to learn the information.

The advantages of mastery learning, according to research, is that it offers clear expectations, fosters mastery of a unit of study, is not competitive, and encourages student responsibility. The procedure is to offer information, provide strategies and activities, provide a variety of assessments and re-teach and re-test if necessary.

Assessment and Standardized Testing

Students will have short, standardized assessments at the beginning, middle and end of a year to help determine where a student is in their learning path. They will also have quizzes and tests during, and at the end of a unit of study to determine mastery of a topic.

During the spring, all students in 7th and 8th grade will take the Smarter Balanced Assessment. The focus is on the continual academic growth of each student. Students will learn to assess their progress from previous assessments and approach testing in a way that makes sense for them individually.

Parent-Teacher Partnership Philosophy

FSMA is designed so that a high level of parent participation is not only welcomed but also necessary for our program to be successful. It is crucial that teachers and parents remain on the same page as much as possible.

Student-Parent-Teacher Conferences

There are three scheduled conference times during the school year:

1. August “Meet the Teacher”/Goal Setting Conference
2. November Check-In/Conference
3. March/April – Review and End of the Year Expectations

August Conference – A family conference is held prior to the school year in August for students to check in with their teachers and develop their education plan. The teachers and parents will guide the student to set realistic goals and then support the student to meet his/her commitments.

November Check-In/Conference – Students are asked to evaluate their progress in academic work, personal responsibility, and group responsibility. Students then request their parents’ and teachers’ points of view in each area. Students share their portfolio and set new or updated goals for the remainder of the school year.

March/April Review Conference – Students are asked to evaluate their progress during the completed cycles. Students again share their portfolios showing work accomplished during these cycles. End of the year plans, goals and expectations will be shared and updated.

Students, parents or teachers may request additional conferences throughout the year.

Communications between Family and School

Cycle Overview – Before each cycle, parents will receive an overview explaining the focus of the upcoming work. The cycle information will include the topics or ideas of each cycle, and a timeline of expectations.

Work Progress – Students are expected to keep up with class work on a daily, weekly and cycle basis. Any work that is not completed at school is expected to be completed at home. Parents can check with their students and can access Google classroom at any time to see work completion, grades, etc.

Report Cards – At the end of each cycle, families will receive a report card summary of student's work and assessment grades. These report cards will communicate the work and level of each student's work for each cycle as well as other necessary information/comments from the teacher.

Communication Regarding Discipline – Middle School follows the Family Handbook for notifying parents regarding leveled offenses.

A few policies that Middle Schoolers *sometimes* need reminders about and that should be reviewed prior to each school year (full policy is in our Family Handbook):

- “Away All Day” Policy for all communication devices (phones, smart watches, etc.) / Devices brought to school must be silenced and put in backpacks/lockers.
- Tardiness to Class – All students are to be on time to all classes
- Dress Code – Please refer to the Family Handbook for the specific policy.

Academic Policies and Procedures

Letter grades will be used on report cards to designate student progress:

A – Exemplary	=	90 – 100%
B – Proficient	=	80 – 89%
C - Progressing	=	70 – 79%
D - Beginning	=	60 – 69%
F - Failure	=	Below 60%
I – Incomplete	=	Work not completed due to excused absence (NO CREDIT until work is completed)
W – Withdrawn	=	Withdrew from course (NO CREDIT)

Coursework/Assignments at Home and School

Students at FSMA should expect to work throughout the school day and prepare for approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours of homework each night (Monday through Thursday) and possible assignments over the weekend if in-class work is not completed. Many of the assignments will be given out at the beginning of each cycle and can be completed at home or during extra time they may have at school. Thus, students know their assignments in advance so they can learn to plan ahead and avoid conflicts or late night studying. Depending on a student's needs, accommodations can be made for a student's workload.

Parents are asked to support their adolescent by providing a family schedule that allows time and space each evening for schoolwork. For concentrated learning to occur, students should study without the distraction of television, radio, computer, phone, and non-academic websites.

If a student requires substantially longer than 2 hours to complete the daily homework, the teacher should be notified so that a student- teacher-parent conference can be arranged to address the issue.

Computers/Technology

All students will be assigned a chromebook to use while at school. The use of computers and technology skills are integrated into all subject areas. The computers are for research and school related activities only. Students will sign a computer use agreement form, and consequences for non-compliance may include loss of computer privileges and possible suspension.



Electives

Students are given the opportunity to explore many topics of interest in electives. These 10-12 week courses allow children time to try out a subject without having to commit to it forever. Students will select from a variety of electives and go to two electives per trimester

At the beginning of the school year, children will choose from a list of the electives being offered. Every attempt will be made to give children one of their top choices for electives, but every child may not get their first choice every trimester. Because these are exploratory courses, we ask that children complete the 10-12 week course that they start. Switching classes once the trimester has started will only be done if there are extreme circumstances.

Students are required to participate in Physical Education and Health each year. Children may bring a change of clothes and will be given time to change prior to physical education classes. Clothing must adhere to the dress code and must include sneakers.

Field Trips and Events

Throughout the year, students will go on day trips relevant to their topics of study. Students will work with their teachers to plan and prepare for field trips. Ground rules will be created by the group before each trip and approved by the teachers. The group may decide to go on a longer trip in the spring. Before the spring trip, there may be a mandatory parent/student meeting to review ground rules and procedures. Although children may have been on overnights in previous years, the social needs of a middle school bring a new set of ground rules and expectations that must be reviewed.

Students are responsible for planning the trip, fundraising for the trip, and preparing/packing everything that is needed for the trip!



Policies and Procedures throughout the School Day

Middle School Lunch

7th and 8th graders will eat in the cafeteria. Students may bring their own or purchase lunch at school. Middle School will participate in the same ordering process as the other grades but will have more independence during this time. And, the inclusiveness, acceptance and sense of community abundant in the classroom will be present in the cafeteria – no one is left out, and students are always encouraged to share their opinions.

Lunches should be nutritious and well balanced. Students may not bring candy or caffeinated beverages to school. Lunches should be brought in an insulated bag/box with an ice pack as students do not have access to a refrigerator. A microwave is available for use but limited time is available so please only bring items that require less than 2 minutes of heating up.

Classroom Snacks

Research and experience indicate that early adolescents benefit by having periodic snacks to meet the needs of their growing bodies. In line with brain research regarding nutrition, FSMA students may bring raw fruit, vegetables or a healthy protein from home, and drink water for a snack. Students should bring a water bottle to class. Sports drinks and juices are not allowed in the classroom, only water should be brought into the classroom.

Transportation

Middle School students ride the same buses as elementary students. They are expected to be role models of appropriate behaviors and leaders in helping to create an atmosphere of positivity and inclusivity. As for all students, electronic devices are not allowed to be used on the bus. The expectations for older students on the bus are high and misbehavior on the bus will not be tolerated.

Athletics and Sports Teams

FSMA is a member of the Delaware Interscholastic Athletic Association to participate in sports at a more competitive level. Currently there are the following sports:

Fall Sports: Co-Ed Soccer, Girls Volleyball

Winter Sports: Boys and Girls Basketball

Social Activities Outside of School

Parents of young adolescents walk the fine line between learning to trust their children's judgment and carefully monitoring their activities. Often, Middle School parents find themselves in social situations where the input and experience of other parents facing similar challenges can be very helpful and supportive, especially in setting and maintaining limits on social activities. As our children move further into their own social spheres, we become more dependent on one another to provide them with consistent expectations and consequences. Parent-to-parent communication is an integral part of a secure support system for our children as they grow and mature.

Middle School parents will be invited to various events throughout the year in order to get to know one another, meet others who may be inviting your child over, and plan important events for our Middle School students.

When planning social activities for outside of school, please remember that this is a sensitive time for children in terms of inclusivity and belonging. Please communicate directly with families/students regarding events, especially when sending invitations, and do not send invitations to school to be given out unless they are for the entire group.

Where do FSMA students go to high school?

FSMA supports children in applying and enrolling at a variety of high schools. Our team has relationships with many nearby schools and FSMA students have been recruited by a variety of public and private schools. The bottom line is that high schools want Montessori kids!

Here is where our students have landed for high school:

Archmere Academy, Al DuPont HS, Aquinas Academy, Brandywine HS, Cab Calloway Concord HS, Conrad HS, Delaware Military Academy, Delcastle HS, Early College High School, Friere Charter HS, Hodgson Vo-Tech, MOT Charter HS, Mount Pleasant HS, Newark HS, Odyssey Charter HS, Padua, Salesianum, Sanford, St. Elizabeth's, St. Mark's, Tatnall, Tower Hill, Wilmington Charter School, William Penn, Wilmington Friends