

USA (Ohio)

Clark Montessori Jr & Sr High School

This public Montessori high school (students aged 12 to 18) has a diverse student population but a very high graduation rate, and many graduates are the first in their family to attend college. Students are not separated by ability level except in math courses, and instruction is differentiated according to student need in order to bring out each student's qualities. The high school is organized by grade level, but students work in multi-age groupings with several teachers in grades 7 and 8. Classrooms are designed to encourage the movement of students among teaching teams. Thematic projects linked to state standards overarch each quarter of the year. The students take honours level core courses and senior students complete a year-long college level research project on a topic of their choice. The school features cultural and scientific field studies and service work, and makes use of community facilities (library, museum, etc). Parents are encouraged to be involved in school and sign an agreement at the beginning of each year, in which they agree to support the learning opportunities at school.

Main Focus of Innovation: CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANIZATION

Other Keywords: alternative philosophy, equity

General Information

Name of the ILE: Clark Montessori Jr & Sr High School

Location/Address: 3427 Winton Ridge Lane, Cincinnati, OH 45232

Website: cps-k12.org

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Clark is the first public Montessori High School program in the US. The intention of the school is to create the highest, most complete academic environment for each student and to form a human community that nurtures an atmosphere of caring & promotes an inclusive social climate. Through Clark's unique learning program, featuring cultural and scientific field studies and service work, students become stewards of the land, the city, and the school.

The staff follows the guidelines that are expected of the students. In that way the challenges of being in a community and having high expectations for academic performance and personal growth are consistent. Technology, critical thinking, and learning to live with grace in diverse community are imbedded into the core ways of teaching and learning.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

The core courses are honours level. Core learning aims are to help young people think critically in each subject area and to become proficient writers. The culminating project is a 20-40 page year-long senior research project on a topic of the student's choice. It is monitored with great care.

The knowledge, skills, or attitudes to be acquired include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, meta-cognitive development, and academic achievement. Besides the commitment to learning, each student commits to the following four goals: (from the student agreement) **Community**-and the fostering and nurturing of relationships that build community. **Hard Work**-and the effort and willingness to meet difficult challenges, both personal and academic. **Respect**-manners are an essential aspect of the way we show respect and caring for others. To act in a civilized way means, in part, to act with manners. **Peace** -we strive to be a community that values the complex global and personal aspects of peace.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

Students are representative of the rich diversity in Cincinnati. The student population is approximately 48% African American, 43% Caucasian, 9% Asian and Hispanic. There are students from poverty and low-income families to middle and high-income families. Because of the focus on building community, we differentiate our instruction and utilize the help of intervention specialists. Therefore, do not separate students by ability level for any courses. Math is an exception, since it is a specifically skill based program.

Students coming from public Montessori programs receive priority for registration. Any student entering grades 7-11 may submit an application. Clark has 700 students ages 12-18.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

All teacher/facilitators at the school have successfully completed a 520-hour program to learn the Montessori philosophy and how to use creative methods for curriculum design and implementation.

Clark has a principal and assistant principal. Those two positions are critical to the success of the school. It is important to note that the teachers in their teams along with the admin team are the decision making body of the school in terms of policy, problem solving, organization, and curriculum.

All teachers have masters degrees in education and many have masters plus 30 (graduate hours post masters).

The administrative team consists of the principal, assistant principal, and the team leaders. The role of the principal and assistant principal is to oversee the teachers, students, budget, discipline, and day-to-day running of the school. They make decisions with the team leaders of the school. Team leaders' decisions are advised by the teachers on their teams. The Instructional Leadership Team meets at least every other week.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

In grades 7 and 8 students are multi-age grouped in communities of 50 with an assistant teacher, one math/science teacher and one language arts/social studies teacher. Teachers design quarter long thematic projects linked to state standards (8 over the two year period). The themes connect the development of the adolescent to the academic work. High school is organized by grade level. Teachers stay with students for two years (9-10 grades theme "Independence and Interdependence"; 11 grade theme "Who am I in society" and 12th grade theme "Who am I?")

Students learn best in an atmosphere of trust. It is the goal of each teacher to bring out the individual finest qualities in each student. Respect, support, and being known to one another is a hallmark of the program. Students are often seen in circles for seminars or community meeting or in small groups for instruction. Students refer to most teachers by first name. Students do a great deal of self-evaluation. Teams of teachers meet regularly with one another to discuss student progress.

Besides being seminar and project based, the program utilizes Pedagogy of Place and features scientific and cultural field studies locally, nationally, and internationally.

Teachers develop their own curriculum using state standards. The training program supports them to create curriculum that is inspiring and that develops curiosity and critical thinking.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

Students learn in large group instruction, small group instruction, in groups with peers, and outside the school on field studies.

Classrooms are comfortable and orderly. There are bookshelves and lamps, areas for sitting on the floor, and tables for lessons and seat work. They are designed to encourage the fluid, but organized movement of students among teaching teams. Currently the school is in a temporary location until a new facility is built in its permanent location. The permanent location is in a middle class walking neighbourhood.

The new facility was designed by the staff and will be LEED certified. The move will take place in the summer of 2011.

Often local experts are utilized, both in the classroom and on field studies. Clark does not have a library. Clark students use the public library, museums, the historical society and the zoo for group research projects. Frequent service projects take groups and classes all over the city to service agencies.

Parents are in charge of fundraising for the field studies. They serve on the Local School Decision Making Committee and on the Instructional leadership Team. They run the Music and Athletic Boosters Association. Clark actively encourages parent involvement. Parents sign an agreement with the child at the beginning of each year in which they agree to support the unique learning opportunities at the school.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

A team of teachers and parents planned for the project for two years before starting in 1994. One of the person's from the initial team became the coordinator and hired a small team of teachers to pioneer the program.

The school initially began for two reasons: to satisfy desegregation demands of the school district and because a group of active parents consistently requested Montessori Secondary of the district. The school became a feeder for the four Montessori elementary programs.

Initially there were four teachers, two assistant teachers, the coordinator, and 50 students. We had a neighbourhood soccer team. The program has grown to 670 students and 95 staff. The curriculum has developed and evolved. The extracurricular program is outstanding.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

Clark is part of Cincinnati Public Schools.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

Students are given grading scales or rubrics for projects so they can self-assess. They have objective and essay tests, make presentations and learn to give feedback to one another, are assessed as they discuss readings in seminars. They prepare for and conduct student-led conferences with teachers and their parents.

Clark has a 99% graduation rate and students range from 30%-50% first generation to attend college.

They take honours level core courses and complete a college level research project before graduating. Clark students are community oriented, comfortable with adults, confident learners with a well-developed sense of respect and social justice, and they are prepared to take their place in society.