



ALTERNATIVE & INDEPENDENT

EDUCATION

Meadow Montessori School stands out with unique national accreditation

BY CAITLIN TAYLOR
ctaylor@monroenews.com

While the title has gone nearly unknown for about a decade, Monroe County is leading the nation in an alternative, independent style of K-12 education.

Monroe's Meadow Montessori School is the only Montessori school in the U.S. to be accredited by the American Montessori Society (AMS) at all possible grade levels, according to Marcy Krever, AMS senior director of communications and public relations.

Catharine Calder, head of Meadow Montessori, said the school has held that unique title since 2007 — and it's still expanding.

Within the past two years, Meadow Montessori remodeled a new building to solely accommodate its high school students, and most recently installed a nearly quarter-mile track on the school's south campus to promote health and wellness.

Montessori schools — an alternative to public, charter and private education — are founded on an education standard based on respect for each student, for all people of the world and for all forms of life, officials said.

"Montessori children learn to think critically, mathematically, artistically, scientifically, and globally," Calder said. "Our children require more than a solid



— Monroe News photos by TOM HAWLEY

Meadow Montessori high school junior Gabe Newcomb, 15 (top), adjusts a telescope during astronomy class. Head of School Catharine Calder (left) teaches English as a second language to high school students. The high school (below) at Meadow Montessori is called "Hobby's House." The school has had a separate house for high school students since last year.

“It's a philosophy of education based on the premise that all human beings want to learn, and that the best way we learn is by interacting with the environment.”

—Catharine Calder, head of school



academic foundation; they also learn skills that will enable them to adapt to a rapidly changing society.”

While any school could call itself a “Montessori” school, to

be accredited by the AMS means that Meadow Montessori passed a rigorous one to two year accreditation process to be recognized as an institution which meets national governance,

curriculum, facilities, educator and learner benchmarks, among other standards.

Only about 10 percent of Mon-

School (cont.)

Montessori schools are accredited, according to the AMS.

Each grade level is independently evaluated, with Meadow Montessori offering all possible educational programs for local students. That includes infant, toddler, preschool, elementary, middle school and high school programs.

"I think Monroe should know that we have alternative educations that go beyond the traditional format," said Catharine Calder, head of school. "Mostly, we want students to be happy and love learning."

HOBBY'S HOUSE

Offering an accredited high school program is one, significant way Meadow Montessori stands out among other Montessori schools, Calder said.

Providing an exemplary high school education is tricky, according to Calder, because of the amount of subjects and staff required for students to remain on track to graduate.

Meadow Montessori's high school program began in about 2005, but the students were housed within the elementary building.

In 2015, the school purchased two acres of land which included a nearby home that was transformed into a high school-specific building for grades 10 through 12.

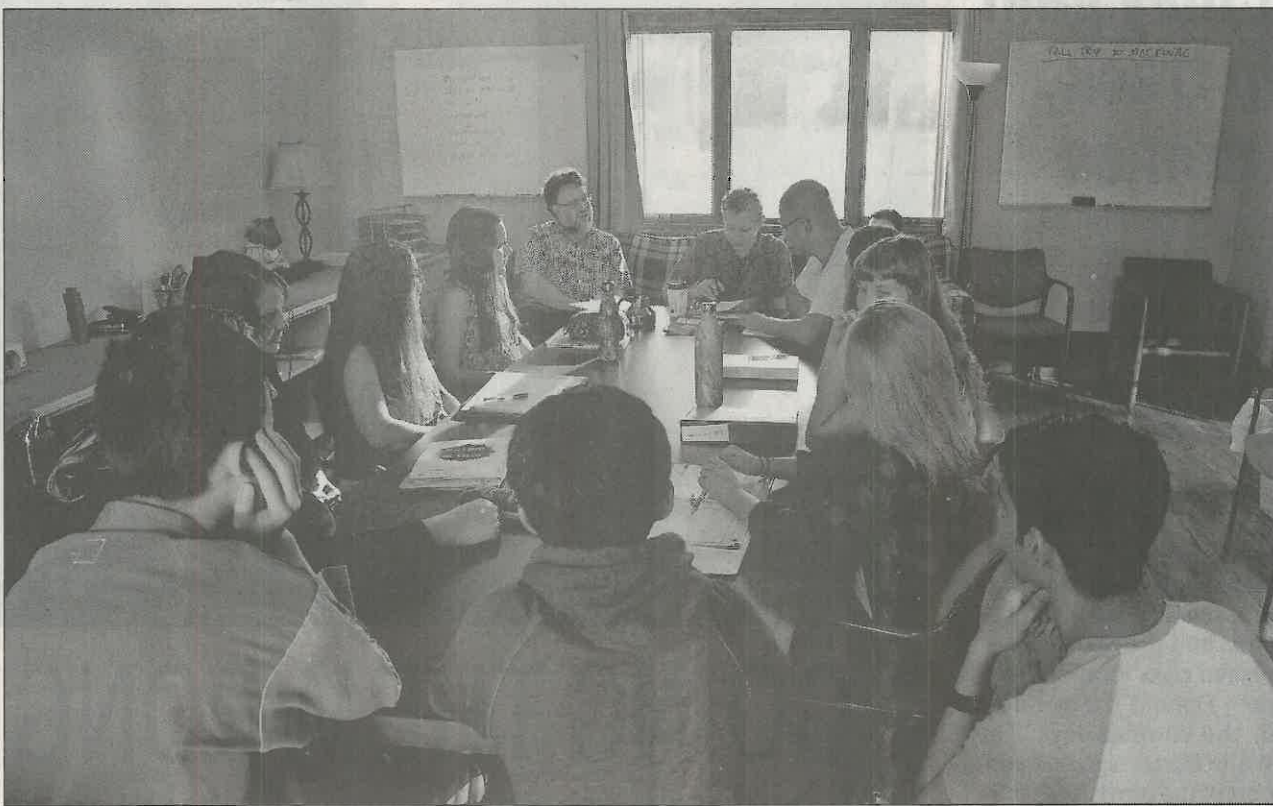
Students began using the new building, which is known as "Hobby's House," last year. The high

Health (cont.)

students participate in a 15-minute morning routine which Kwiatkowski said engages their mobility, flexibility, resistance and cardiovascular systems.

"It's giving them an opportunity to move as they naturally would, but in a systematic manner," she said. "It's a great way to start the morning, getting the brain ready to learn."

Students are grouped in teams of two or more to support one another through the morning exercises.



— Monroe News photo by TOM HAWLEY

Meadow Montessori School high school coordinator Gregory Lansingh starts a morning meeting with his students.

school is named after former parent and long-time board member Hobby Nels, who donated much of his time to the construction project.

The building includes four classrooms for teaching — two multipurpose classrooms, a science lab and a student study area. Art, literature and history often are in one room, while math and science are in another. There's also a student locker room.

There are 14 students enrolled in the high school program.

Students have the opportunity to take advanced placement (AP) courses and also dual enroll at Monroe County Community College. They take two educational trips per year with a goal of learning

survival skills.

"It's pretty hands-on, pretty independent," said Mekulash Baron-Galbavi, 17, who has completed his education solely at Meadow Montessori. "We have a lot of choices of what we learn and how we apply it."

THE MONTESSORI PHILOSOPHY

Both the high school and remaining grades are guided with four major Montessori-based principles.

The schools aims for each of its students to learn, in addition to state requirements, an ability to concentrate, self-discipline, love of learning and social ability. Meadow Montessori also empha-

sizes teaching its students about social justice, sustainability and peace.

"It's a philosophy of education based on the premise that all human beings want to learn, and that the best way we learn is by interacting with the environment," Calder said.

Montessori classrooms are designed differently than in public or private schools, Calder said, because of the school's belief in movement. Each classroom has a door to the outside, where students are encouraged to go if they need to take a breather from schoolwork.

Several classrooms also are interconnected so students can freely move from one room to the next.

"Our belief is that kids

need to move their bodies in order to learn," Calder said. "Students are very good at self-regulating themselves."

The school also largely values the arts and language studies. Each student learns a second language, either Spanish or Chinese, beginning at toddler age. All students also play an instrument and often attend art classes.

When it comes to completing schoolwork, Calder said students may choose which courses they'd like to study first, as long as all of their work gets completed. Otherwise, there are consequences.

"This school has been a part of my life forever," Mekulash said. "I'm very comfortable here."

The daily routine includes breath work, jumping jacks, lunges, hip circles and about 10 other movements.

"I like having the fresh air," said Olive Aronson, 6. "I like playing outside."

The younger age groups, like toddlers who are unable to follow a structured exercise plan, often fulfill the daily movement requirement by dancing. Kwiatkowski said the infants are walked around the track in strollers.

"Hips are kind of key to the body's mobility," Kwiatkowski said. "Most of the

focus is making sure the hips are moving."

The school's staff also is included in campus efforts to improve daily movement.

Each staff member is encouraged to walk or jog five to 15 minutes per day, Kwiatkowski said, and their movement is recorded in daily exercise logs. She also is available to assist with stress management and relaxation techniques.

Some staff members participate in on-campus yoga classes once per week, in addition to the daily movement.

High school students also take a weekly 45-minute yoga class with a certified yoga instructor.

Kwiatkowski said her next goal is to implement

a schoolwide nutritional guidance plan.

She intends to rotate morning movement plans on a monthly basis.

New school program emphasizes importance of movement, wellness

BY CAITLIN TAYLOR

ctaylor@monroenews.com

Students at Meadow Montessori School are on track for a healthy and active school year — literally.

With the summer addition of an almost quarter-mile track on the school's south campus, every student has walked or ran a mile each day of school so far this year, according to Catharine Calder, head of school.

The daily mile is part of the school's introduction of a new health and wellness program aimed at promoting a commitment to exercise and mobility.

"This is our first year with it, and we are utilizing it as much as possible," said Kristen Kwiatkowski, the school's infant program lead and director of the wellness program. "It gives them that break and relaxation to get back into the classroom to focus."

Beginning with a goal to increase the amount of movement in the school, Kwiatkowski used her exercise science degree as a foundation for creating a school-wide daily movement plan.

Along with the daily mile,

See **HEALTH**, Page 7A



Students in Meg Fedorowicz's classroom exercise first thing in the morning as part of the school's wellness program.