THE MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF SAN ANTONIO

Nestled on a sprawling 24-acre campus in northern San Antonio, The Montessori School of San Antonio (MSSA) educates children ages three through fourteen utilizing the Montessori philosophy.

The School was founded in 1974 as the Judson Montessori School. The School relocated to its current campus in 2000, and the name was changed to the Montessori School of San Antonio in 2008. MSSA has grown from 18 Primary students at its inception to become the largest ISAS-accredited Montessori program in south Texas with over 340 students enrolled in Primary through 8th grade. MSSA has evolved into a thriving, successful institution that is almost at its capacity enrollment of 350 students. The School operates with a balanced budget and has both a cash reserve and a debt retirement fund.

Upon stepping onto the campus at The Montessori School of San Antonio, one finds an environment of cheerful, engaged students, committed faculty, and an overall sense of calm and peace. Faculty and administrators welcome the children in the morning at dropoff and see them off in the afternoon. “Grace and courtesy” are terms not simply mentioned in the School’s materials but lived out in daily interactions.

The MSSA community is quite diverse, and to complement a respectful school climate, MSSA honors difference across ages, genders, religions, and cultural backgrounds. Parents describe a climate where, consistent with the Montessori philosophy of honoring each individual, students and adults of varied national, ethnic, and religious backgrounds are welcome, comfortable, and feel valued.

MSSA provides an academically rich, individualized education in the Montessori tradition for every student. The School guides students to discover new challenges at their own pace at a beautiful and peaceful campus, allowing them to focus on skill mastery and joyful learning. The staff creates a culture of diversity and acceptance, consistency and exploration, and support and

“Montessori lets our children be who they truly are while discovering their full potential.”

Lower and Upper Elementary Parent
independence where the personal development of each student is emphasized. The result is a collaborative community of parents, educators, and students who celebrate differences and honor the successes of every student.

The Montessori School of San Antonio is a member of the American Montessori Society (AMS). MSSA is accredited by the Independent School Association of the Southwest (ISAS), an organization of 89 schools in six states in the Southwest. ISAS accreditation is recognized by The International Council Advancing Independent School Accreditation (ICAISA), formerly the National Association of Independent Schools’ Commission on Accreditation, which was established in July 2018 to provide quality assurance and accountability for the accreditation programs of its independent school member associations.

THE POSITION

The Montessori School of San Antonio seeks a mission-driven leader who understands and respects the mission and core values of MSSA and who strives for excellence in all aspects of the School.

The Head of School role at MSSA is multifaceted. The School’s size and the close-knit environment among the multiple constituencies allow and require the Head to play many roles: instructional leader; the face of the School in the San Antonio and Montessori communities; the unifier of and cheerleader for the faculty; a warm, friendly presence among the student body and the parents; and, of course, the chief executive officer of the institution.

The Head of School will oversee all daily school operations including admissions, staff relations, and parent communication. The Head sets the tone and models the values of the School in interactions with students, families, staff and the community. The Head will also oversee the development of the educational program for the Montessori School of San Antonio and report directly to the Board of Trustees.

As the sole employee of the Board of Trustees, the Head works closely with the Trustees. In addition to attending and helping to lead regular Board meetings and committee meetings, the Head interacts regularly with Board members, especially those whose children attend the School. The Board/Head relationship is solid and appropriate, and roles and responsibilities are clear. Standing Board committees include Executive, Trustees, Institutional Advancement, and Finance.

The Head of School leads an administrative team that includes the Assistant Head of School (and Lower Division Director), Upper Division Director, Business Manager, Director of Community Relations, Director of Facilities, Health Services Coordinator and Director of Childcare. She also acts as Human Resources Manager for the School. Through the two division directors, the Head oversees the work of the faculty and assistants. The Head also works closely with the Parent Teacher Council (PTC).
MISSION, CORE VALUES, PHILOSOPHY

The mission of MSSA is: "The Montessori School of San Antonio guides children to be passionate learners, independent thinkers, and engaged citizens." MSSA further describes its purpose as "Education for a Lifetime."

The Montessori philosophy pervades the program and is most evident through the first three divisions - Primary (PK 3-4 and K), Lower Elementary (1-3), and Upper Elementary (4-6). In the Middle School (grades 7 and 8), a more traditional approach is introduced to prepare students to succeed in traditional high schools.

MSSA is guided by these core principles:

- The Montessori learning environment is organized around mixed-age grouping to provide rich peer stimulus and continuity in the learning process.
- Individual differences in learning style and pace are accommodated within the classroom.
- The curriculum is organized to move from the simple to the complex.
- The requisites for optimal learning determine the time allotted for different activities.
- Learning is an active and experiential process, with studies typically based on a student's previous work performance.
- Students are guided to interact freely and responsibly with their learning environment, their peers, and their instructors.
- An active effort is made to understand difference diversity, especially in matters of race, religion, ethnicity, age, and gender.
- The primary tool for assessment prior to Middle School is the demonstrated mastery of individual, performance-based activities.
- The primary role of the teacher is to guide the student toward maximum learning through responsible choices and concentrated effort.
- The faculty recognizes that learning takes place only when the student is engaged and committed to the learning process.

“Our daughter is doing scientific research in the third grade that I did in advanced science classes in late high school. At MSSA, she learns that the sky is the limit and her curiosity can take her anywhere.”

Lower Elementary Parent
PROGRAM

The School program is organized by divisions; Primary, Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, and Middle School. In addition, cocurricular offerings complement the academic program and include library, Spanish, music, art, and physical education. Athletics are available at all levels. After-care and summer programs both enhance the children’s experience and provide help to busy parents.

The Primary level serves children ages three to five years old. Learning activities are developmentally appropriate and address these areas that are critical to children’s cognitive growth: Language - oral, written, and thought; Order - coordination of fine and large motor systems; outer orientation, or the awareness of where didactic materials are located; and inner orientation, specifically the understanding of his/her place in the family and the School community; Detail and Aesthetic Appeal of Didactic Objects - carefully selected Montessori materials beautifully designed to attract and sustain the child’s attention; and Social Relationships - appropriate grace and courtesies that enable the child to maintain positive and productive social relationships throughout life.

Lower Elementary students are six to eight years old; this division corresponds to grades 1-3 in traditional schools. As with the Primary program, learning activities are age-appropriate and address these areas that are critical to children’s cognitive growth: Academic and Personal Evolution - the child is serious about the acquisition of academic skills, as well as the development of a personal and social conscience; Expanding Imagination - the child’s intellect is greatly empowered by a remarkable imagination that is in a constant state of integrating knowledge into an ever-expanding mental framework; Maturing Peer Relationships - the child takes a serious interest in maintaining positive peer relationships which involve understanding cultural diversity, accommodating different perspectives, and scrutinizing different moral codes and systems of justice; and Intellectual Curiosity and Sensitivity - the learning environment and curriculum are intricately linked to the child’s intense intellectual curiosity and sensitivity to dynamic social relationships.

Upper Elementary includes students nine to twelve years old and corresponds to grades 4-6 in traditional schools. The Upper Elementary years are a time when the child’s skills and knowledge that are developed in the Lower Elementary level are expanded, embellished, and refined. There is a strong inclination for an Upper Elementary student to work more in the abstract than the physical, but when the child encounters challenges that require him/her to clarify key concepts, he/she can refer to the familiar didactic materials. Academic areas continue to be clearly defined and carefully prepared. Developmentally, the child’s learning environment reflects his/her evolving intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social growth.

“The warm campus and nurturing environment drew us in initially – along with the Montessori philosophy. We stay because we have watched our children enthusiastically thrive and excel in so many ways. MSSA gives children the freedom to discover that learning can be joyful.”

Lower And Upper Elementary Parent
The Middle School enrolls students in grades seven and eight. MSSA’s Middle School program is carefully designed to meet the emotional, social, and academic needs of young people between the ages of twelve and fourteen. At this crucial period of a child’s development, the Middle School provides students with a warm, caring, supportive environment that seeks to develop the potential of every student. While honoring the School’s commitment to the principles of a Montessori approach, the Middle School serves as a bridge between Upper Elementary and the more traditional environments the graduates will experience in high school. In doing so, it prepares students for the high schools of their choice, confident in their academic, communication and interpersonal skills.

A rigorous and supportive academic curriculum is at the core of the Middle School program. Daily small-group classes in math, science, and writing stress traditional skills, and the focus on small-group projects also helps students develop their leadership skills. History classes provide students with opportunities to carry out extensive research and to participate in a wide variety of presentation options. Literature is taught using materials that teach the students to interact with texts, to think critically and creatively, and through their literature seminars, to speak clearly. Thinking and speaking skills are further strengthened by weekly Socratic discussions, Architects of Real Change (ARC) research project, and current events seminars. These skills and more are reinforced by the culminating experience and school tradition, participating in the Model United Nations trip to New York where speechmaking, writing, collaboration and negotiation, and conflict-resolution skills are highly valued just as they are in the Middle School classroom at MSSA.
“The teachers, along with the overarching principle of the love of learning, come together in a community, a village, to raise happy, healthy, creative, compassionate, connected, generous, kind, loving, and productive citizens of the world.”

Middle School Parent

TEACHING AT MSSA

The teachers at MSSA, with administrative and staff support, embrace the Montessori model that helps to set the School apart from others. From Primary through Lower and Upper Elementary levels, all lead and some assistant teachers are Montessori-trained. At the Middle School level, while teachers honor the School’s guiding principles that are rooted in the Montessori model, they possess subject-specific expertise and create a program that eases students in their transition from the Montessori-focused lower levels to the more traditional ways of teaching and learning at the high schools they will eventually attend.

All teachers and administrative staff are expected to embrace each child’s uniqueness and cultivate his or her natural desire to learn. In their relationships and their instructional activities, they are expected to model the grace and courtesy, the guiding presence and the mutual respect and sense of inclusion that characterizes the MSSA environment. As is commonly understood by members of the School community, MSSA is a joyful place to learn because, for its dedicated faculty, it is a joyful place to teach.

THE CAMPUS

The campus combines modern, spacious learning areas with fields, gardens and outdoor recreation spaces. With high ceilings, abundant natural light, and large footprints, MSSA classrooms are optimized to work in tandem with the School’s educational philosophy. The School is designed for open flow from one area to the next and a sense of belonging to the community as a whole.

Learning at MSSA is not restricted to classrooms or the library, as spaces around the main building turn the outdoors into a laboratory of limitless possibilities. Any given moment of the school day may find students tending classroom gardens or engaged in study on the nature trail. Recreational space abounds as well: MSSA’s campus features an outdoor ball court, large open areas for physical education and play, separate playgrounds for Primary and Elementary, and a regulation soccer field. As part of the 2016 expansion project, a new gymnasium and four-classroom dedicated Middle School was added – with science lab, outdoor classroom, and performance stage.
LIVING IN SAN ANTONIO

Founded in 1718 as a Spanish mission and colonial outpost, today’s San Antonio is a vibrant, thriving city located in the heart of the Texas Hill Country. San Antonio combines the energy and opportunities of the nation’s seventh largest city with the pace and charm of a much smaller town. Blessed with great weather that includes 300 days of sunshine per year and an average temperature of 70 degrees, San Antonio affords a comfortable lifestyle. The site of two well-known tourist attractions, the Alamo and the Riverwalk, San Antonio also has attractive shopping, dining, and cultural opportunities. The city is extremely accessible via the two interstate highways that cross nearby and an expanding but easily navigated international airport. Over a dozen colleges and universities, public and private, are located in the area. San Antonio has a rich historical and cultural background, and influences from the various cultures that have shaped the city over the last 300 years abound. The Hill Country is nearby and easily accessed and offers a more relaxed pace from city life.

PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

The successful candidate will understand, embrace and, ideally, have experience in a Montessori environment. At the very least, the candidate’s educational philosophy must resonate with the Montessori approach. Classroom teaching experience would be beneficial.

The Head should be able to develop and articulate a clear vision for the next chapter of the School’s history, and strategic planning experience is preferred. Strong leadership skills and demonstrated experience in building a cohesive team are essential. The next Head will need to be a calm presence, a good listener, and a clear communicator. S/he should be comfortable establishing and maintaining clear, high standards in the development of the academic program and in the expectations and oversight of the professional staff. The Head of School should be skilled in resolving conflicts confidently and sensitively.

The next Head should also have experience in establishing and refining systems such as program development and coordination, faculty evaluation, and hiring and staff development. While continuing to allow for considerable teacher autonomy, the Head should ensure that the curriculum and overall program are coherently and consistently integrated.

A Bachelor’s degree in a relevant field is required; a Master’s degree is highly preferred.

“For a parent, there are few experiences more rewarding than knowing your children spend their days encouraged to expand natural talents, challenged to move beyond individual difficulties, and motivated to extend interests into aspects of all academic and artistic disciplines. This is our experience at MSSA.”

Primary Parent
PERSONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

This warm, close-knit community at MSSA requires a warm, personable, accessible leader who will quickly get to know the students and faculty. The Head must lead by example as well as by precept and must model the highest levels of ethical, professional behavior. MSSA seeks a servant-leader who is confident yet humble, and able to make fair but firm decisions. S/he must be approachable, kind, and visible in the School community. Generous with his/her time, the Head is expected to be present at most School functions and activities.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR THE NEXT HEAD

The next Head of The Montessori School of San Antonio will have the opportunity to:

• lead and participate in the development of the next strategic plan;
• facilitate the transition from a successful, twelve-year tenure of the current Head of School;
• clarify and communicate about the Montessori approach and its implementation with parents who may not be familiar with this philosophy; develop a clearer understanding of the transition between the Montessori approach in Upper Elementary and a more traditional environment in Middle School and communicate the nature and purpose of that transition clearly, both internally and externally;
• refine the role of the recently created position of Upper Division Director with oversight of Upper Elementary (grades 4-6) and Middle School (grades 7 & 8);
• recruit and retain Montessori-trained faculty in light of some significant upcoming retirements; provide additional teacher training and professional development opportunities based on the Montessori model;
• formalize systems in areas such as campus security, student evaluation, program development, and faculty/staff hiring, evaluation and professional development;
• ensure the continuation of a strong admission program that has resulted in nearly full enrollment; study and improve student retention in order to enable more students to have the full PK-8th grade MSSA experience;
• improve communication among the faculty and between the faculty/administration and the parents in all facets of School life;
• examine various programs including athletics, Spanish, technology, art, and music as well as the facilities needed to support those programs; continue to look for ways to improve and enhance these offerings;
• help the Board define what the next major initiative will be for the School and help determine how to raise the necessary funds for that initiative.
THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Prospective candidates should send the following materials in a single PDF document to the search consultants:

**Bob Kirkpatrick**  bob@educationgroup.com  
**Dave Davies**  dave@educationgroup.com

- Letter of interest specifically addressing this position
- Resume (education and work experience)
- Statement of educational philosophy
- List of five professional references with contact information
- Letters of reference, if available, but not required

The Montessori School of San Antonio admits students of any race, color, gender, creed, or national origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the School. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, creed or national origin in employment or in its administration of its educational policies, admission policies, financial aid programs, athletics, or other school administered programs.

“Our experience at MSSA during the past six years has been one of wonder and growth. We have seen our children grow and thrive in a Montessori environment and we have enjoyed being part of this warm and welcoming community.”

Lower Elementary Parent