In an effort to provide information to our board on the middle school program at Providence, a questionnaire made up of 6 questions was given to the middle school students of the 2018-19 school year. Their thoughtful responses are included in this presentation.
Middle school is at the very beginning of the third plane of development. Maria Montessori often compared this plane to the first plane (toddler and primary levels), because the child is undergoing phenomenal physical and mental changes in a very short period of time. These changes can make this time particularly trying for a child, and being able to develop in an environment that is designed to address these changes and to complement them is crucial for this age group.

Some of the areas that Maria Montessori focused on for this age group were adaptability, valorization, independence, in addition to gaining an understanding of their place in the world – all of this on top of the academic knowledge they gain during this time. You will hear mention or inference to all of these ideas in the comments you are about to see.

In addition, we have designated which comments come from students who did not have a Montessori background prior to coming to the middle school. These young people provide a unique perspective because they have experienced other styles of education.
“The most important things I have learned is how to create and maintain friendships and how to not take everything too seriously. I have definitely changed a lot while here. In a large school, it perhaps would have been easier to blend into the crowd. But here, seeing friendships I was not a part of and feeling my discontent, I thought ‘I need to start changing my actions.’ Scary, but it worked.”

“The ability to have so many people in a small community get to know each other very well.”

“I think that something I have learned is that you should be nice to everyone. You don’t have to be friends with them, but everyone should be generous because you don’t know what is going on in their lives.”

“The most important thing I learned were social skills and coping with major changes in your life. It also serves as a transitional period in your school career.”

“Social skills by far. At other schools I wasn’t as social because there was a lot of judging, but here I can be myself.”
“I think the most important thing I’ve learned here is that everyone can contribute to get to a goal. People may contribute in different ways, but in the end most people are just trying to help. This helps me to listen to others and to let them try. It may make the outcome better.”

“I have learned how to be part of a team. It will help me in future jobs and will me understand people as I move through life.”

“This school has taught me a lot about how to easily make friends and how to get along with people you don’t like so much, which is a good skill to have when you go to college or get a job.”
“The most important thing I have learned is independence. This helps me in the near future, because I can’t always count on my parents. This school teaches me how I can solve my own problems.”

“I think the most important thing I have learned is you can’t always wait for someone to do something for you. This will help me to take action in the future.”

Non-Montessori student (first year at Providence): “I have learned more about independence and doing stuff on my own. At my old school, we either did group projects and activities or the teacher would do a lot of work with us. I think it is important to learn independence so in the future I won’t have to rely on others to help me do my work.”
“The middle school has helped me learn how to be a leader, to communicate, and make smart choices. This will help me make good decisions and represent myself in a good manner.”

“My time at this school has taught me leadership and made me step out of my introverted shell. I’m more comfortable with myself too. The people in this school changed my life. (I know that sounds cheesy.)”

“The most important thing I have learned here is the importance of having a good attitude towards things you don’t want to do. No matter how long you scowl at your paper, an essay isn’t going to write itself.”

“During my time at the middle school, I’ve learned that staying positive is useful in all areas. Academically, it helps with homework, presentations, and other projects. Socially, it’s useful in the sense that you can help friends while not letting all the bad things get to you.”
“The most important things I have learned is balancing my time. Every day when I get home to do my homework, I make sure I get the things that are due tomorrow finished first and if I have time do a little extra. This will help me when I go to college and in the future.”

“I think the most important thing I have learned here is how to adapt to different environments. I had been at another school (public) for so long that Providence’s way of doing things seemed foreign. This will make big transitions in the rest of my life easier. Being adaptable is a good skill to have.”

Now for some of the academic comments:
“The most important thing I have learned is how to give a presentation and prepare for a presentation. It has made me more comfortable talking to large groups of people and I rarely get nervous anymore.”

“Math and reading were the things I didn’t know how to do, but when I came to Providence in upper elementary as a new student, they caught me up with everyone else. Now I’m doing the same reading and math as my classmates!”
“My favorite thing is that it is small, you can hang out with friends, and you feel comfortable talking to the teachers.”

“My favorite thing is the family I’ve made throughout my 9 years here. When I first started at the middle school, it was scary, but after the first day I had reconnected with all my friends and I had made so many new ones.”

Non-Montessori student: “I like how small it is and how you know everybody. It is a more personal experience.”
“My favorite thing is how everyone works together to complete a task. I enjoy this because I like to know that everyone is doing their part.”

“My favorite thing is that you can work at your own speed and difficulty without getting behind. I enjoy how the teachers can help you speed up or catch you up because they can help with homework when you need it, or you can stay after school to get homework done.”

“I enjoy the social aspect of learning. I think it is good for people to be able to talk about work amongst their peers. Although it can get out of hand and distracting, it is still nice to talk to other people about a problem you might be having with the work.”

“My favorite thing is how we have interesting electives, land class and open time. The electives include things such as woodworking or sewing. I also like recess (our open time) because other middle schools don’t have it but I think it is essential.”

“I really like land. It lets me be active, have fun, and learn new skills.”

“One of my favorite things is our amount of daily homework. I know not many people like homework, but I think it is very necessary so that you don’t forget what you just learned –
a nice refresher. Also, I think that the amount of free time or freedom that we are given is good because it forces you to use your time wisely and carefully.”

Non-Montessori Student: “I love that I’m being challenged in my classes. At my old school, I was never challenged and everything was easy and it was quite boring. Here, I’m challenged in my classes and I find classes more interesting.”
“The trips, they allow me to get out of my comfort zone and learn things that you can’t in a classroom. It also allows you to have fun and make new friends.”

“I think my favorite things we do at this school is the bonding trips we go on at the beginning of the year. When I first heard ‘bonding trip’, I thought it would be boring, but actually Ocoee was the best 4 days of my life! I got to meet & make so many new friends and even reconnect with people I had fallen apart from. It was amazing!”
“The most difficult factor of middle school was identifying the kind of person I wanted to be and the kind of work I wanted to submit. This school has taught me what kinds of people I should spend time with. Not people who bully and peer-pressure me, but people who are uplifting and make me smile and laugh.”

“Overcoming my fears. Finding friends and sailing were both things that terrified me at first. I eventually learned that taking risks is simply a necessary part of life (it took me a while.) However, I think the trips were a smart way to encourage people like me to realize that sometimes, the actions that require courage will bring happiness.”

“Making smart decisions. Sometimes when things get out of hand, instead of making the smart choice to leave, I stayed a part of it and got in trouble. Now I’m learning to make better decisions for myself.”
“I think the most difficult thing is geometry because it is a challenging subject. I feel there are times when it is very hard and unenjoyable, but there are also times when it is easier and even fun. Even the challenges can be fun. I don’t feel like anything is too hard or too easy in the school. All classes are a fair challenge.”

“The most difficult thing for me was the transition from elementary to middle school. I wasn’t used to much homework, but everyone has been helpful and welcoming and that made the transition easier.”

“The most difficult thing for me is organization. I’ve always been a little scattered, but coming to this school really helped me with that.”
DO YOU THINK OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULD GET TO HAVE A MONTESSORI EXPERIENCE DURING THEIR MIDDLE SCHOOL YEAR? WHY?

“Yes, because this Montessori experience is a great one with all of the activities and hard work and you couldn't get this experience at another middle school. You get help, socialization, and you get outside world experience — not just what you need to get for school.”

“I think they should because Montessori focuses more on techniques than other schools.”

“I think everyone should have a Montessori experience, no matter what age. It was especially good in middle school because this is the age where it's awkward and people can be mean, but this place has given me a chance to look at the brighter side and I'd much rather go here than a public school or even another private non-Montessori school.”
WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO STUDENTS PREPARING TO COME TO THE MIDDLE SCHOOL NEXT YEAR?

“Be yourself. Making friends is so much easier if you just are you. Trying to be someone else prevents people from really knowing you, and sometimes you meet the best people just by being silly.”

“Get prepared for a school you won’t forget!”

“Be ready for challenges. You’ll face many of them. Be prepared for work because you will be given a lot of complete, but you will have lots of fun and you will learn so many cool things!”

“Get your homework done the day you get it! It clears so much stress and makes everything so much easier.”

“Take initiative – socially and academically – it will benefit you a lot. Try to enjoy the work/learning – if you do, it will be a lot more fun and easier for you.”
Again, we wish we could have shared all of their comments with you as they are all so well-written and cover so many different aspects of our school, and they also give you a glimpse of the success and self-confidence the students feel, but with limited time, here is a good representation of how the students view their school:

“Providence Montessori Middle school is a place that focuses on not only working hard, but working smart. They emphasize the importance of working together and having a good attitude toward others.”

“It is a place where the students can express themselves and have more freedom. It is a community.”

“Usually, I describe it as a different style of learning. Montessori is more individualized and offers a more hands-on experience. Providence has regular classes like math, Spanish, science, humanities and advisors, but we have different ways of organizing our classes. For example, instead of English, we have CRL, which covers a broader spectrum. We not only complete the basics of language, but we learn to tie it into other works and topics. We have a land class where we learn about environmental sciences and about our land. Science and Humanities have a much more hands-on approach.”
“Providence is a small school that focuses a lot on the community. You have classes like other schools, but one of the most amazing things about Providence is that when you don’t understand something, you can ask a teacher and they will help you until you understand.”

“I would describe Providence as a school that is flexible with academic level and willing to work with students individually to pass their personal goals while being free thinking and fun.”

New, non-Montessori Students:
“Providence is an amazing school that will push your limits and makes you a better person. Its’ a school that teaches you many valuable skills for later on in life. It is definitely different from any other school and may surprise you at first, but it’s a great place to grow and feel at home.”

“This is like no other school I’ve seen. The classes are basically always fun. There’s hardly ever a dull moment in the school day. It’s very easy to make good friends here and it’s easy to become more outgoing. There are a lot of different personalities that you will be exposed to. It can really open your eyes to things you’ve never thought about.”