

Spread the Word about Lake Country School's Extraordinary Junior High Program!

Walk into the junior high space at Lake Country School and you'll see students working independently, helping each other out, and chatting about a project with a teacher. You'll see light, airy, beautiful environments and meet energetic, dedicated staff. You'll find students participating in a philosophy seminar, conducting a writing workshop, or finishing up a woodworking project. You'll find students who are critical thinkers and good problem solvers, students who care about their local community and who care about the world.

Lake Country's program blends the Montessori philosophy with a practical approach that prepares students to make a successful transition from junior high-to-high school. One unique feature of Lake Country's junior high is its small size—enrollment is about fifty students so that class sizes stay small. The program is designed to meet the needs and guide the tendencies of the younger adolescent. A combination of special programs and opportunities, trips and residencies, core classes and specialty subjects not only prepare students for future academic challenges, but prepare them to become responsible community members. Both the lessons they learn and the friends they make stay with them well into adulthood.

The Junior High includes integrated academic components that provide challenge and encourage joy in learning. Throughout the year students also take both core classes and specialty subjects. Humanities classes integrate social studies and language arts. The math program offers classes in pre-algebra, algebra and geometry (they read Euclid!), and the science program focuses on physical science and a thorough investigation of the scientific method in a lab-based, hands-on approach. Specialty subjects include French, art, health and sex education, philosophy, Latin, music, woodworking and physical education. The wide selection of subjects provides the variety as well as the challenge so necessary for the growth of adolescents. They need opportunities for debate and group work.

Creative and physical expression helps adolescents establish their identities. While camping, biking, physical education classes and farm work at the Land School offer some physical challenges, students can also join intramural teams. These co-ed teams play basketball, floor hockey, volleyball and badminton, and compete in cross-country events. Students can also join the school band, choir, or orchestra.

Returning alumni talk a lot about the special programs, remembering even (maybe especially) the difficult times with grins and laughter. They recall the Odyssey trips that start the year and combine physical and academic challenge while creating the beginnings of a strong community. They reminisce about working on the cook crew, making meals for fifty or more people on a set of camp stoves. One student might remember the time the junior high visited the 18th-century blacksmith in Williamsburg's living history museum, while another will recall finding a pot shard as she participated in a real archaeological dig in Colorado. Someone else will remind the others about the time they waded in the water, netting blue crabs and baby flounder along the Mississippi coast.

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But the Odyssey trips are just one of many special programs. Students also take a bicycle trip at the end of the year, riding over 100 miles across Minnesota or Wisconsin. They put on a play during January interim, every student participating as part of the theater troupe, building sets, sewing costumes, creating programs. Students can opt to spend a six-week residency at the Land School–Lake Country's 160-acre rural campus—where they harvest honey and sap for maple syrup, clear trails, and care for llamas, chickens and sheep. The residency students live together in community—cooking, eating, working and learning together.

Adolescents are in a sensitive period for justice and need to experience personal dignity. They need opportunities to be leaders. They need trust and respect. The entire junior high meets once a week to address community issues. The staff expects all students to exhibit leadership in some way, as role models, by speaking out about issues at the meeting, by leading their own parent/student/teacher conferences. Students start to develop their personal values as they work with others. Each student has a staff mentor, and the size of the program ensures that all the staff knows each student well. With this kind of guidance, the entire community works to minimize the self-doubt and drama that is often experienced in this age group. All students entering the junior high sign a contract in which they promise to work at building community, to be respectful and kind to every other classmate, and to commit to their studies. The group revisits these values during their weekly meetings.

The Montessori philosophy gives students room to explore their passions, and the small program allows for a lot of individual attention from teachers. Lake Country's adolescents are exposed to a variety of subjects and are challenged physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. They learn to care about the land and see themselves as stewards of the planet. The program's focus on building a human-hearted community gives students the tools to work well with others. This is education of the soul, not of the surface, that sends students off to the finest high school programs ready to make a difference in the world. To some people, Dr. Montessori's idea of education as the path to peace, especially with adolescents as the means to achieve the dream, may seem hopelessly utopian and unrealistic. At Lake Country School, junior high students make that dream seem attainable.