

MARIN MONTESSORI SCHOOL

#6

SPRING 2017



Outcomes



Contributors to *The Current* • Zarrín Atkins • Lisa Bennett • Joseph DeRose • Ben Geffner •
Debra Hakman • Sophia Hatfield • Phoebe Hicks • Amanda Mallory • Sam Shapiro •
Generous and Talented MMS Photographers

Thought-leader Sir Ken Robinson—whose TED talks “Do Schools Kill Creativity?” and “Changing Education Paradigms” have been viewed by millions around the world—recently spoke to a national group of independent school educators. In addition to declaring Montessori education as an exemplar of the best approaches to education, he presented a striking image: Just as the soil is the most potent determiner of a plant’s health, the “soil,” the educational conditions into which we place our children, impacts profoundly, on so many levels, their development and the trajectory of their lives. I am inspired by the essays in this issue of *The Current*, for they speak to the growth power that comes from a school that revolves around the developmental tendencies and needs of children and teens in each stage of their evolution, and honors their individual passions.

While touring the Junior High with a boarding school admissions director recently, we came across two seventh grade boys in an empty classroom, building something with wood and glue. They were engrossed in their project for their “bridges and structures” class, the goal of which was to build a model bridge that could withstand the most weight, with a particular emphasis on using trusses (a word I had to look up later). The admissions director turned to me and said with some degree of awe, “In how many junior highs would seventh grade boys working on their own stay so focused and self-motivated?” This moment speaks powerfully to the experience and outcomes of a Marin Montessori education.

Here are other snapshots of what I have seen “growing” in MMS “soil” these past few weeks.

- A circle of toddlers chose tambourines by naming their various colors, then sang and danced and tapped their tambourines on their bodies with delight. What an incredible first exposure to school: intellectual analysis intertwined with discovering community and joy with their bodies, voices, friends, and teacher!
- Primary children took responsibility for guiding and instructing younger classmates in geography work, and the younger children were so inspired by the intellectual curiosity, creativity, and competencies of their older peers that they dug even more deeply into their own map work.
- Lower Elementary students chose an in-depth volcano study that culminated in model building, woodworking, light wiring, and presentations to the school community on classifications of volcanoes and lava, and a lighted map of the world showing all the volcanoes on the planet.
- Upper Elementary students travelled to New York City where they threw themselves into diplomacy, international politics, and public speaking at the Montessori Model United Nations.
- Junior High micro-economy students engaged in their own version of SWOT analysis, deciding on and implementing smart phone credit card readers at their farmers market stand to increase sales.

A MMS alumnus, now a senior at St. Ignatius College Preparatory, told the audience at our Admissions Open House that the greatest gift MMS gave him was a complete and confident understanding of and appreciation for himself. Because he was seen and valued for who he was while at MMS, he in turn was able to see and value himself. With this assurance he pursued a high school career both as a varsity athlete and as a dedicated musician. With great excitement, he shared that next year he heads to Cornell University to play baseball and to major in music, and that it was MMS that gave him the conviction to resist those who would try to label him as just one or the other—a “jock” or a “music geek.”

Each of these snapshots shows students thriving through an environment infused with intellectual curiosity and opportunities for exploration, in-depth study, and innovation – an environment that encourages and supports self-discovery along the way. In this “soil,” our students thrive.

So enjoy the essays in this issue of *The Current*. Delight in all that MMS grows.

SAM SHAPIRO
HEAD OF SCHOOL

2







Trusting the Process

As a six- to ten-year-old year old kid attending Marin Montessori School, the ability to pursue and explore whatever field I was interested in was more than liberating. I was able to develop critical thinking skills from an early age that prevented me from defaulting to the robotic processes offered by traditional textbooks and classes. This not only helped me develop as a student, but more importantly, it helped me develop as an individual. It's an environment where questions have the highest priority, and where the desire to learn is more important than the desire to get the right answers.

Despite Montessori's emphasis on independence, though, it also encourages collaboration and participation. To this day, my best friends are all

people I've met through Montessori. Their career interests range from mechanical engineering to playwriting to playing professional soccer, but what brought us all together was our common love for learning. We'd do independent studies together, we'd sit in on lessons together, and we wrote a lot of stories together. Montessori laid the foundations for us to become passionate about learning, and enabled us to act upon this passion both inside and outside of the classroom.

This desire does not extinguish once a student leaves Marin Montessori; it carries with them the rest of their lives. I know that it's stayed with me as I pursue a degree in Business Administration with double emphases in Entrepreneurship and Finance, along with a minor in Environmental Studies. I know that it's stayed with me as I've joined a professional business fraternity on campus and been elected its Vice President of Alumni in my first year. As much as I try to hide it, I especially know that it's stayed with me when other kids in my college classes roll their eyes when I raise my hand in class for the twelfth time, as if to say, "*There goes Geffner again, always asking questions and providing his input.*"

I can't help it.
I'm a Montessori kid. ●

4



BEN GEFFNER
MMS GRADUATE 2012
CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

When a 4th Year Can Make a Difference

No parent wishes their child to do a fourth year in a program. For some reason, we often feel the need to push our children through, keep them on the educational path they've been on from the beginning, keep them with all of their friends. How will "staying behind" affect our child emotionally? Will our child be challenged enough academically? What will our child do about all of her friends moving on without her?

These were the issues we faced when our daughter, Sydney, was a third year primary student. While she was doing all the work that was required of her, Roshini felt like it took a real effort for her to keep up with her peers. At one of our conferences, Roshini presented the idea of Sydney doing a fourth year in primary. My husband and I were mixed about what to do. On the one hand, we wanted her to move up with all of her friends. On the other hand, with two older brothers at home to keep up with, the last thing we wanted was for her to struggle at school. We decided to have her stay for a fourth year.

We never could have imagined the amazing growth that took place during this year. The third year is all about being a leader, setting an example for the younger kids, becoming more independent and more confident in oneself. Looking back, Sydney never really had this opportunity when she was a third year. There were enough girls ahead of her academically, socially, and emotionally to take on that leadership role. Sydney was at the bottom of the proverbial "heap." Doing a fourth year gave her the opportunity to come into her own. She got to be

that leader, grow more confident in her abilities, and shine as an individual setting an example for the others in the classroom.

The beauty of Montessori is that a child can move to the next level when he/she is ready, without sacrificing academics. For Sydney, the fourth year meant higher level math lessons and more detailed studies. It meant presenting work in other classrooms, something she had never been confident enough to do before. It meant entering the lower elementary this year fully prepared for the large amount of work, especially writing, expected from each student. Out of my three children, she has by far had the easiest transition into elementary and has excelled in her first year because of the confidence and skills gained in her extra time in primary. As for our concerns about her friends moving on without her? Sydney is now a thriving second year with friends in both second and third years. ●

[DEBRA HAKMAN
MMS PARENT]





6

The Lasting Benefits of Marin Montessori

1

While my Montessori education usually only enters my mind when I'm trying to write in my messy cursive, wondering why I never learned to print, I know that its impact goes much deeper than that. I went to Marin Montessori School from primary until eighth grade, so it's safe to say I'm as much of a product of Montessori education as you'll find. As a freshman attending the University of Southern California, I'm always struck by how few students have found their passion, or even have much interest in the classes they're taking. I'm constantly grateful that I have a deep love for learning new subjects, and that I was able to find real joy in filmmaking at a young age. I think both of those outcomes are a direct result of my time at Marin Montessori.

I find it a funny paradox that when I think back to my days at MMS, I can't remember being assigned work, and yet it feels like I was learning more important, deeper lessons than many of my friends from other schools. I remember sliding beads to practice arithmetic and fitting blocks into a box to learn spatial reasoning. This taught me to think three-dimensionally and to work with my hands. I remember working on studies and being encouraged

to pursue any topic I wanted, teaching me to be an intrinsically motivated learner. I remember making crafts at a table of friends, learning to use my creativity, but also to develop collaborative social skills. I always told my friends about how I never had homework, but there was something even more valuable happening.

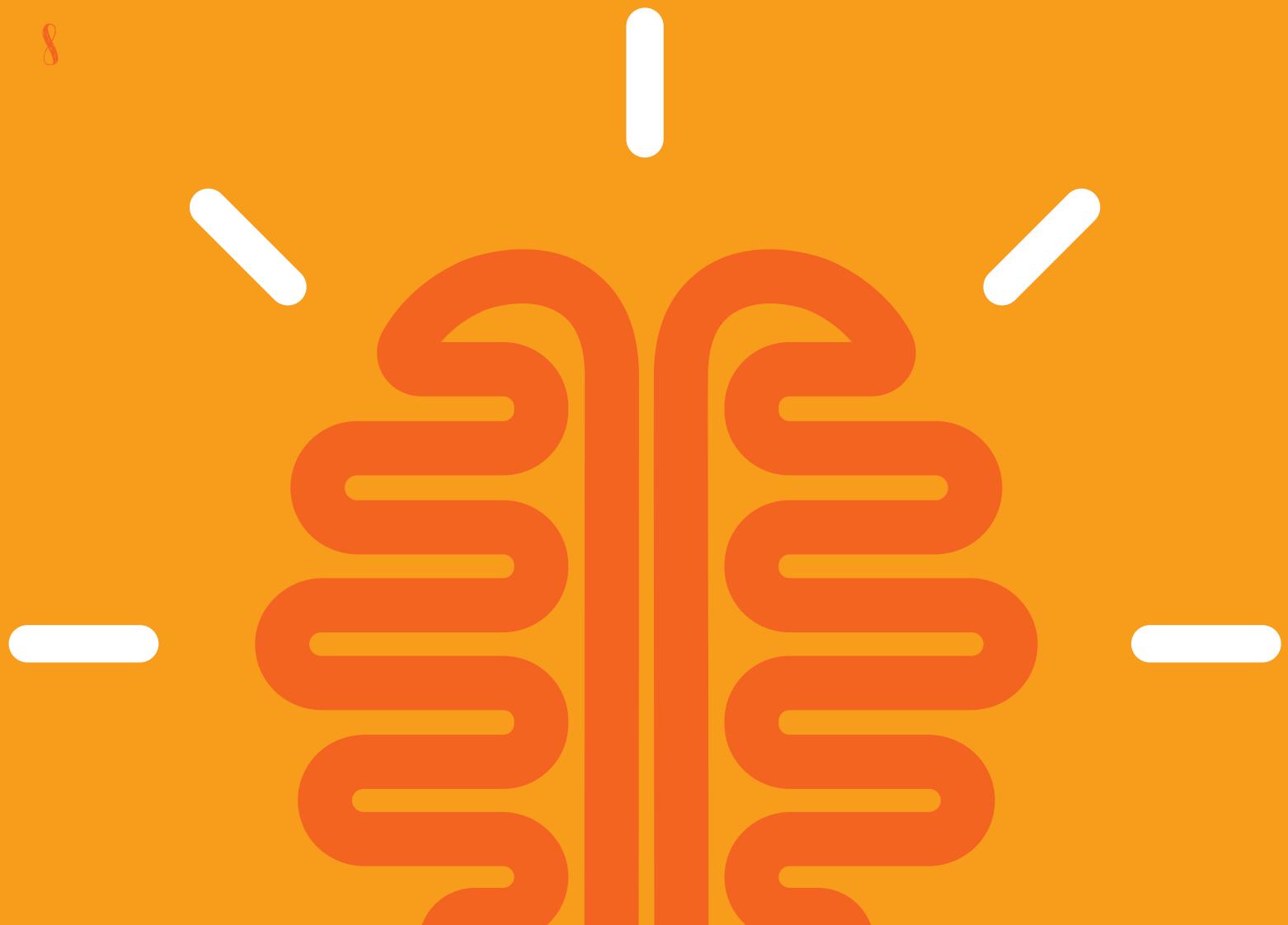
Instead of just handing out pages of facts to memorize or giving lectures to take notes on, Marin Montessori inspired me. It made the classroom an active experience. MMS didn't just teach me information, it taught me how to learn. My time at MMS made me an avid, self-motivated learner. Everything I learned helped me become the best version of myself—maybe even the cursive, too. ●

JOSEPH DEROSÉ
MMS GRADUATE 2012
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



Beyond Innovation

8



In 2011, *The Harvard Business Review* published an article, “Montessori Builds Innovators.” The article was strategically placed in the “innovation” section of the review, written by a former Montessorian with a stellar résumé, and had all the bells and whistles, including the famous people whose educations were rooted in Montessori (a.k.a. “The Montessori Mafia”). There was nothing wrong with this review and interpretation of why this type of educational pedagogy would effectively support child development, create opportunities for leadership, and lead to success later on in life. Many other established papers have published similar articles highlighting innovation as an outcome of a Montessori education. However, innovation isn’t the only outcome, though it’s definitely a sexy one to focus on. So, what is the outcome of a Montessori education? The simple answer: *that depends.*

During open houses, alumni panels, and reunions over the years, I often find myself in awe of how composed, well-spoken, and independent our former students are. It’s a nice pat on the back for educators (though they are too humble to take any credit). The credit does go to the preparedness of the environment, teachers, and the tireless work of Maria Montessori. As a Montessori educator a good portion of my free time is spent talking about what I do and how an education built on the foundation of human tendencies and psychological characteristics can withstand the test of time. And in these conversations with strangers I often find out how many people actually went to Montessori schools as children. It’s beyond gratifying to hear how they are living their adult lives: how they started an organization that empowers adolescent females in Peru; that they serve with Doctors Without Borders; earned a law degree (for fun) and now travel the world blogging about food; became a *New York Times* best-selling author of young adult novels or an archivist at Northwestern University’s library; coached an underdog basketball team into the NCAA Final Four; works on a social network app for athletes while traveling the world and competing in triathlons; met her husband (also a Montessorian) at a research station in Antarctica; or now teaches in a Montessori school. These are just some examples of “Montessori Mafia” members that didn’t make the cut in the mainstream media shout outs. The one thing that ties all these people together...they love what they are doing.

Innovation, creativity, selflessness, curiosity, independence, self-control, and empathy are the *better angels of our nature* and are just some of the qualities that are engendered within a Montessori education. Creating an environment that supports this is no small feat; “...it involves, the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live.” (*Education and Peace*, pp. 34-35).

Maria Montessori believed that if a child can be helped to develop control of herself, of her impulses, emotions, actions, then the hope is that as an adult she will be able to be in charge of herself and become an agent for peace. The template for the creation of an agent of peace rests in adherence to the developmental needs of each plane. Montessorians speak so consciously and passionately about these developmental planes because we observe them in action every day.

In the first plane of development the child is reared as a member of society. Within the lessons of a Primary classroom are exercises on “Grace and Courtesy” where children are encouraged to practice basic actions of love and respect as a part of their work. In the second plane of development the child learns about the outside society and navigates the grey areas of relationships with others. Elementary children begin to investigate the role they have to play among others in the universe and are encouraged to explore and leave the confines of the classroom. By the time they reach the third plane of development they are ready to engage in the opportunities that would allow them to learn what it means to be a responsible adult: real work. The activities of an adolescent community lead teenagers to prepare for an independent adult life, where reason guides emotions and the formation of their will enables them to make appropriate decisions for themselves and those for whom they are responsible. The fourth plane is that aspiration of the responsible adult, living among others and contributing to society.

So, what is the outcome of a Montessori education? That depends on who your child is. ●

ZARRÍN ATKINS
ELEMENTARY LEVEL DIRECTOR

A photograph showing a group of children and an adult (likely a teacher) gathered around a table, playing a board game. The children are focused on the game, and the adult is smiling and interacting with them. The setting appears to be a classroom or a learning environment.

IS MY KID
learning
Anything?

A Montessori Veteran Responds

I have some bad news for you. Not every child is going to be a Leader. Specifically, a Leader in this sense of the word: a comic book figure who takes no prisoners and wields a sword. A superhero, a legend, an undefeated warrior, a titan of industry with raging success. This Leader is a myth, and at parties tends to take over dinner conversation.

I vividly remember looking for schools for my son, and being completely turned off when they said they were building Leaders. Mathematically this doesn't pan out. Plus, I thought this meant they were building the type of people that I didn't want my son to become.

Given that my husband and I are what we consider nice people, with an income that allows us (barely) to call Marin home, who have survived New York City public schools and Catholic schools, with an honest hope beyond all hopes that our son can do better than we did, we considered many options for his education, most importantly any option that didn't resemble our own.

We settled on Montessori for preschool, which is an easy sell. The classrooms are beautiful, the teachers are gods and goddesses, and there is peace and light in the world.

When it comes time for some "real" educating, many parents then veer off to the traditional model, primarily because they understand its language and outcomes. Grades are given to indicate success, and the path is laid out in orderly obstacles. This is a system we can understand.

What happens when you choose a school with no grades, mixed-age classrooms, slim statistical evidence on outcomes, and traditions that can sometimes feel like a cult? And for us, throw your son into the first graduating class of a new school (the MMS Junior High in 2009) with eight other students, a junior high with no track record of high school placement, and you have two parents who should be jailed. Putting this much faith in an "untested" program is considered criminal in Marin.

We are happy to announce that not only are we not incarcerated, we are proud of our son. He is in college now, so the benefits of Montessori are evident in hindsight (note – our hippie-raised child managed to get accepted to five outstanding universities). Here is how we understand the beauty of Montessori: it builds entrepreneurs, people who are confident and encouraged in their curiosity, people who love to learn, who have embraced the discipline of self-evaluation, who take the time to explore topics deeply (vs widely). These are the people you are excited to work with because they are comfortable with their abilities and interpret failure as an opportunity. These are the people with an idea who can execute on that idea. They don't buy into the anxiety about grades; instead, they look at their performance objectively and upon evaluation (both by the self and by others), they adapt accordingly. They value their community, learn to be of the whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This personal growth takes place under the guidance of a brilliant woman who radicalized education by focusing it on the child. And it turns out that by focusing on the child ("follow the child" as you hear often in Montessori), the adults get out of the way and the child can develop into that person they were meant to be. The child's accountability is to oneself and to one's community. This is much more powerful a form of evaluation to many children than grades are. And this beautiful ecosystem works best when the teachers are nurtured, the parents are nurtured, and the child is allowed to thrive. I've seen it at MMS and I hope you do too. ●

11

LISA BENNETT
FORMER MMS PARENT AND TRUSTEE

A few months before the school year ended in 2016 I had no idea what I was going to do for my ninth grade year. I had the choice of going to a private high school where I had a lot of fun when I visited, but wasn't quite sure it was the school for me; or going to my district's public school, which I wasn't sure that I was ready for; or staying for a third year at the MMS Junior High. After much thought and consideration, I decided to stay for ninth grade at MMS because it became clear that experiencing another year in a comfortable place, rather than jumping ahead, was a good idea for me.

In the ninth grade, I have grown academically. At the beginning of the year, I set a goal to focus on writing; as a result, I have had the occasion to compose many different types of essays, and I have advanced significantly. The most challenging essay that I wrote this year was a literary analysis of *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine. It gave me the opportunity to use more complex vocabulary and grammar and to learn an entirely different format for writing an essay. Although it was difficult, when I was finished with my final draft I was extremely satisfied, and a little sad it was completed.

12

I've also had many memorable moments at the Junior High. I spent time with our community of girls during residential and also had fun with my five-person math class. During girls' residential, a two-week period where we stay at school 24/7, managing our workload is the biggest challenge. Although a lot of homework has to be done, the teachers are very supportive, and we can complete our homework with classmates; it was one of the best times of my day during those two weeks. Also,

my math class had so much energy and creativity every morning. Discussing (and arguing) about the math homework has broadened my mind, and it was the best community to have during a difficult math year. Most important, I had the opportunity to go to Spain and attend a language school while staying with a Spanish family. I came back knowing much more Spanish and with a love for exploring new places and cultures. These opportunities have shaped me to be the person I am and will affect me positively for a lifetime.

The ninth grade at MMS has helped me focus and prepare for high school, and now that I have waited a year I feel much more ready and excited to move on. Though I was the only ninth grader this year, I have bonded and talked to new people and grown even closer to those with whom I was already friends. Although I have made new friends, I still have a great bond with my former classmates currently in high school; we constantly have "reunions," and seeing them again is always an exciting time.

Next year, I am repeating ninth grade at a high school and am looking forward to moving up with the current eighth grade class. Staying for ninth grade at MMS has been an extraordinary experience—a once-in-a-lifetime chance—and I am very happy that I decided to stay. I hope to cherish these moments forever and grow even more. ●

SOPHIA HATFIELD
MMS JUNIOR HIGH NINTH GRADER

My Chance to

A photograph of two young women standing outdoors. The woman on the left is wearing a denim jacket and jeans, smiling at the camera. The woman on the right has long dark hair and is also smiling. They are standing in front of a yellow building with a red roof. In the foreground, the word "grow" is written in large, bold, yellow letters.

grow



How MMS Has Impacted Me Thus Far

Greetings from this “second-semester” senior! It feels like just yesterday that I was feeding chickens, making lunch, and enjoying the company of my peers at the MMS Junior High. Time really flies.

The last several months of this school year have been hectic, to say the least. But, inevitably the college application process ignited a time of thoughtful reflection for me. Writing short essay after short essay, prompted by “talk about an experience that shaped you” or “how have you experienced diversity in your life” or “talk about your interests and what led you to them,” took a lot of time and even more brain power. Fortunately, it was a process that I felt prepared to go through.

These college essay prompts immediately made me think a lot about how I have changed and grown as an individual in the past years. Included in that reflection are my memories of Marin Montessori, its Junior High, and the transition to my current high school, the Bay School. I engaged in numerous conversations with friends about how the essay writing was going for them: how easy or how difficult it was. For many, it was difficult.

While naturally there are challenges that I, too, faced throughout this process, I found that my ability to think both creatively and reflectively, and then subsequently write about those thoughts, was actually kind of exciting. I believe that my Montessori education helped me become the reflective and creative thinker that I am today, two qualities that I've found are vastly important in many capacities.

The kinds of opportunities that we Montessori students were able to take part in are really like no other. Not many kids can say that their class trip one year was to Kauai, or that they performed in a musical every year in elementary school, or that they were able to take integrated classes all year long, or that they received specialized attention from some of the best teachers out there. While admittedly I eventually had to realize that I wasn't going to be in this "bubble" forever, the skills, mindset, and perspective I gained throughout my years at MMS prepared me well for what was to come.

I have found that there have been many aspects of my high school experience that have closely paralleled the Montessori one, and caused me to utilize tools that MMS provided me. Having the freedom of choice, being in a non-traditional academic environment, and the small community that was maintained so well allowed me to be constantly curious about new things. And curiosity, I've found, has been a pillar of importance in thinking about my future - something that wasn't that necessary as a middle schooler.

While this curiosity may have gotten a little lost in translation during the first two years of high school, since our schedules are mostly set in stone, it came back in full swing in these final two years. Immediately I was intrigued by class offerings that were interdisciplinary. My favorite class junior year was called "Artist as Activist," a combination of activist art and humanities. Had I not had the earlier exposure to similar "integral" classes at the Junior High, my reaction after reading the class description may have been different. This past fall, I took a class called "Social Movements of the Late Twentieth Century," a class that not only covered historical movements, but also encouraged us to compare them to issues that we also face in our present world. The opportunity to take the class couldn't have come at a better time. Many of the discussions we had and movies we watched helped my peers and me better wrap our brains around all of the things happening in the world around us, especially socially and politically. Four years ago I wouldn't have known that

social justice and activism were areas that I would become passionate about, but I do truly believe that my Marin Montessori education shaped me into the kind of person who would take the leap and dive into new topics I hadn't previously explored. It really blows my mind how much we can change, yet in many ways stay the same, over just a few short years.

Marin Montessori prepared me to maintain a sense of curiosity, to be open to opportunities that present themselves, patient when things are uncertain, but also not forget about passions that have been part of my life for a long time. I spent ten years with the San Francisco Girls Chorus, often having to leave school to go to rehearsal, but my teachers never failed to continue to encourage me to keep singing. The Chorus not only provided me musicianship skills, but also the opportunities to travel globally and gain a better sense of self both personally and musically. Thanks to the ongoing support of my teachers, I was able to take full advantage of what the Chorus offered me, and ultimately write about it in my college essay. Because of the qualities that I feel I have as a student of Montessori, I know that I will continue to sing in college, that I will jump at the opportunities to take classes about social justice, and that I will be excited about brand new subjects as well.

Undoubtedly, there are still many unknowns in terms of my future. I'm not sure yet where I'll be going to school next year or what my major may end up being, what classes I'll take, what career path I'll pursue, or what cities I'll explore. I firmly believe my Marin Montessori education helped shape me into the type of person I am today, and someone who will be ready to conquer the obstacles, both challenging and exciting, that the future may present.

15

**PHOEBE HICKS
MMS GRADUATE 2013
THE BAY SCHOOL OF SAN FRANCISCO**

The Next Phase: After Junior High

The outcomes of the junior high experience at Marin Montessori—what high school options the students have, where they go to high school, and how they do when they get there—have been pretty amazing. I joined the program three years ago in the role of high school counselor, and now that I have worked with my fourth class of eighth and ninth graders, I can say that I see a pattern that is both consistent and yet characterized by some interesting inconsistencies.

I'm tempted to say that all the Marin Montessori eighth and ninth graders I've worked with have told me that they love their school. It may be that not all of them have said that, but that's what I recall. The number of kids who have told me that, and the enthusiasm with which they've said it, has been striking. In my private practice I work with students who attend every school you can imagine, and some you can't, so I've talked with kids who range from being really happy about school to kids who are miserable. As with any school, particularly where many of the students start when they are very, very young, by the time students are in the junior high program at Marin Montessori, they vary tremendously in terms of their interests, talents, abilities, and personalities. And they all, or almost all, love their school.

What do they love? Over and over I hear that it's the freedom and the structure. Hmm ... two seemingly contradictory concepts and yet well combined in a program where students can choose how they might learn something and be instructed very directly, getting clear and meaningful feedback and understanding what's expected of them. They love that. They feel a commitment to what they choose to study, and they understand clearly how well they meet expectations and achieve their goals.

There have been many discussions, debates, and deliberations about what it means to be well educated, what students these days need in terms of preparation for college and for life, and how school, from the moment it begins when children are so young, can contribute to the development of an

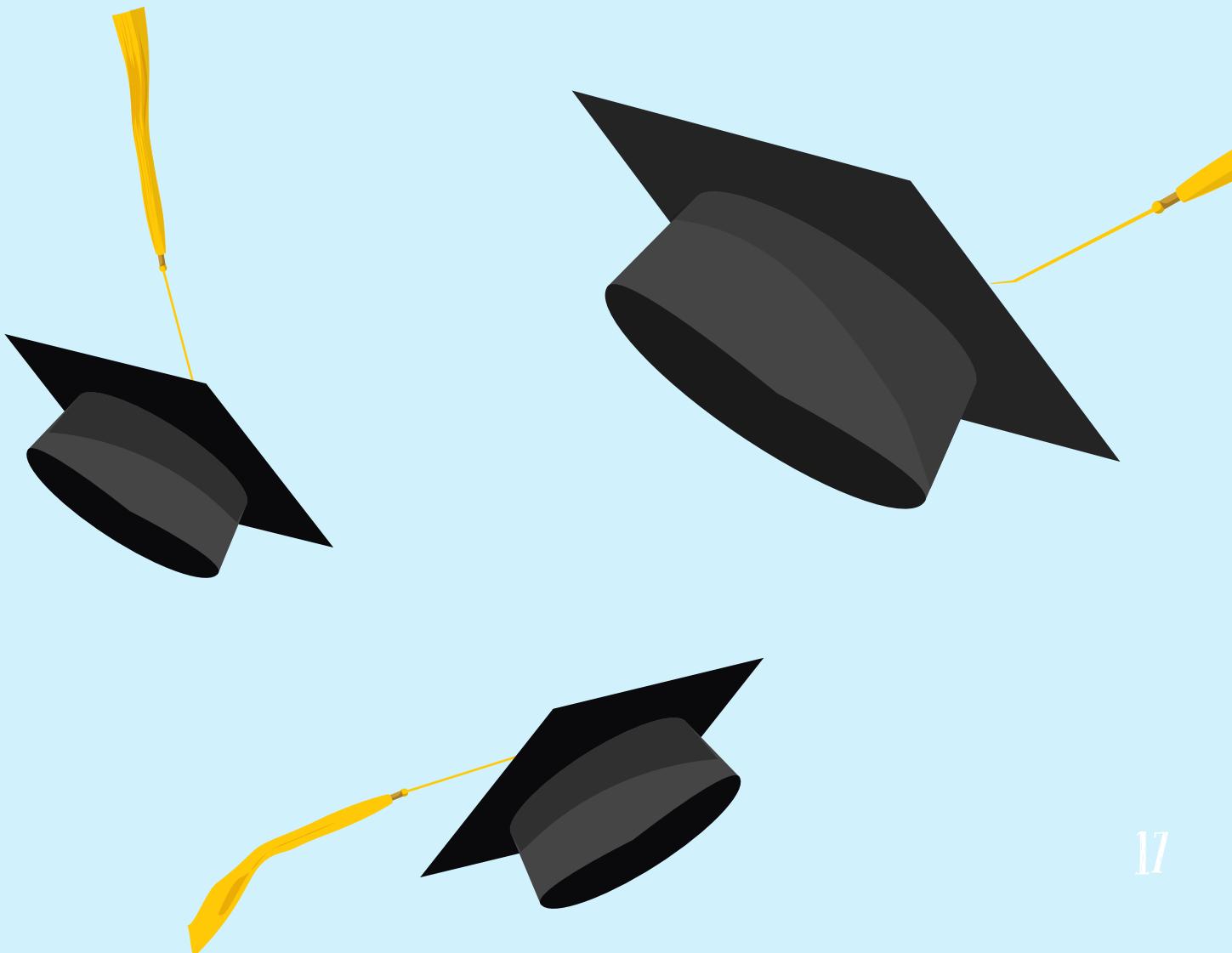
individual who thinks, analyzes, takes responsibility, collaborates, creates, and is goal oriented.

Graduates of Marin Montessori School are attending private and public high schools—some of those high schools are very large and some of them quite small, some have a religious affiliation, are single sex, are away from home, are academically rigorous—and each student has found that next school that is the best match for him or her. What is so good to see is that they are doing well. They are well prepared, not just academically, but in terms of knowing how to affect their own education, delve into interests, tolerate frustration, advocate and ask questions, and make their school experience what they want it to be. I think that their ability to do so, given how different they are from each other, has to have a lot to do with their experience in the junior high school program.

It's fun to work with students and their parents to explore and sort out what the best school might be for them for the next phase of their education. It's exciting to see them and their families move on and thrive. Maybe I've just been fortunate to witness such good outcomes the last few years, or maybe this is something that's special, among many special aspects of the school, about Marin Montessori and the way the program and community impacts the students.

So I'm now getting to know this year's eighth and ninth graders, and I can see that we will be looking at almost every kind of high school out there. The list of schools they go on to attend will be varied, illustrating that each student has come into his or her own and is headed in a direction based on individual preferences and launching from a base that provided the confidence and skills necessary to take the leap into the next exciting experience. ●

AMANDA MALLORY, M.A.
EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANT
MMS HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR



17

Representative high schools where MMS graduates have received acceptances and attended

The Bay School of San Francisco
Berkeley High School
Berkeley Independent Study
Branson
Convent of the Sacred Heart
Drew School
Idyllwild Arts Academy
Marin Academy
Marin Catholic
The Marin School
Marin School of Environmental Leadership
Marin School of the Arts
Novato High School
Oxbow School
Phillips Exeter Academy
Rancho Cotate High School
Redwood High School
Sacred Heart Cathedral's Inquiry & Innovation (I2) Program

St. Ignatius College Preparatory
Saint Mary's College High School
Salesian High School
San Domenico
San Francisco University High School
San Francisco Waldorf School
San Rafael High School
Santa Catalina School
Santa Fe Preparatory School
Sir Francis Drake High School
Sonoma Academy
Stuart Hall
Tamalpais High School
Tamiscal High School
Terra Linda High School
The Thacher School
The Urban School of San Francisco

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