

Rochester Montessori School

Rochester, Minnesota

Head of School

Start Date: July 1, 2021

rmschool.org

Overview

Located in what is often called one of America's most livable cities, Rochester Montessori School (RMS) is poised for an exciting future. Students range in age from 18-months-to 8th grade. Committed to Montessori principles throughout, RMS also introduces the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years Programme in grade six. IB brings an exciting world-mindedness to an already culturally diverse student body. Indeed, RMS has seen a wonderful educational flow from Montessori into IB. The success of RMS middle schoolers in the many high schools to which they matriculate, is proof of the wonderful education they receive.

Best known as home to the Mayo Clinic, Rochester, Minnesota attracts the highly educated, progressive families who find just what they are looking for in Montessori and IB education.

Having just celebrated its 50th anniversary, the school has tremendous potential. It seeks a Head of School to begin July 1, 2021 to lead the school into its next 50 years with vision, excitement, love of children, and a commitment to make the school all that it can be.

NOTE: At the time of this writing and as you are reading this Position Description, much is still unknown about what the 2020-2021 school year will look like in the COVID-19 and post-COVID era. It is impossible to predict how RMS will operate when the new Head begins in the summer of 2021, just as it is for all schools. While the new Head will need to be creative and flexible, they will benefit from a school that has known for 50 years who it is and knows the educational foundation upon which it is built.

Mission

To guide the child through a prepared environment to become an independent thinker responsible to, respectful of, and compassionate for self, community, and the world.

The School

Rochester Montessori School was established in 1968 by a small group of parents searching for the best secular education for their children. The Montessori program was initially offered in a private home to 12 students, but demand in the community steadily grew and led to the development of the current 15-acre campus in northwest Rochester in 2005, where the school now serves more than 200 students.

RMS offers a Montessori program in its early-childhood and elementary divisions. In 2013, the IB Middle Years Programme (MYP) for grades six through eight was officially approved and the school was designated as an International Baccalaureate World School.

Overall, a Montessori/IB education begins with respect for the whole person, for their learning styles, strengths, challenges, knowledge, and experiences. The program addresses each student's cognitive development and social, emotional, and physical well-being. The faculty guide students to become active and caring members of their communities as well as internationally minded learners.

From the start, the mind-body connection has been an essential element of a Montessori education. Rochester Montessori School doesn't offer interschool sports, but it does have a strong focus on physical health and wellness, as well as on free and organized play. Students are physically engaged every day.

The school also offers a Spanish language program, a vibrant music program, and an impressive, UN-inspired Virtues Project designed to transform the culture of the school and provide tools designed to make character education a natural part of the child's experience. RMS offers excellent before- and after-school programs including after-school "Studios" that vary in focus from term to term.

Academics

The school's tagline, "How children learn influences who they will become," drives teaching and learning and provides the school's outstanding environment that supports each child's academic, social, and emotional development. Starting with the RMS Toddler Community (children between 18 to 36 months), an educational alternative to day care, each classroom is carefully prepared to meet the emerging developmental needs for children. In the Children's House rooms (two years 10 months to six years of age)—which include kindergarten in the third Children's House year—each child is guided to develop concentration, coordination, a healthy work cycle, care for the environment, reality based creativity, and a good sense of self within the classroom community. Independence and attention to tasks are developed by the use of concrete materials in various areas of the classroom.

Following the lead of Maria Montessori, the elementary program has worked hard to create "the prepared environment." Among its features is an ordered arrangement of sequential learning materials, designed to be developmentally appropriate and aesthetically appealing. Put to use in the noncompetitive Montessori classroom, the materials enable children to develop at their own rate with the goal being to build a strong academic and social-emotional base for the middle school years and beyond.

Experiential learning takes place in each elementary classroom in a variety of formats as children explore anthropology, biology, botany, chemistry, earth science, economics, geography, geometry, history, language, literature, mathematics, psychology, sociology, technology, and more. As they learn to manage their time, the children also become independent, self-directed learners who make daily decisions and choices. In the two elementary divisions, students also engage in the five Great Lessons, which focus on how the world came to be, the development of life on Earth, the story of humankind, the development of language and writing, and the development of mathematics.

The IB Middle Years Programme is designed to build upon this base and aims to further develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through knowledge, intercultural understanding, and respect.

The MYP curriculum is organized into eight subject groups: the arts, design, individuals and society, language acquisition, language and literature, mathematics, physical and health education, and sciences. Each subject consists of defined learning objectives, key and related concepts, global contexts, and content. The content is presented through a variety of teaching and learning experiences including presentations, investigations, field trips, and units of study. Activities encourage creative, critical, and reflective thinking and provide considerable intellectual challenge. Each course further guides students to develop communication skills, intercultural understanding, and global engagement.

Rochester Montessori School graduates go on to some of the top high schools in the region as well as to top colleges and universities beyond.

The Arts

The visual and performing arts are woven throughout the elementary curriculum. They are designed to help children think creatively and develop various forms of expression. The MYP also includes classes in both the visual and performing arts. As artists, students experience the process of creating art, with a focus on developing and enhancing curiosity, creativity, and performance capabilities. Students also work to deepen their understanding of the arts in terms of historical and cultural contexts. In addition, students maintain an arts process journal in which they demonstrate progress and record the development of ideas and skills.

Music is also integral to a Rochester Montessori School education in both the elementary and middle divisions. Through music classes, students learn the basics of music theory, music appreciation, and music history. Through hands-on instrumental experience and choral singing, travel to see and hear live music, and bringing in professional musicians, playwrights and directors, the students' overall educational experiences are deeply enhanced. Private instrument lessons and band experiences are also offered.

School Life

Everything at RMS is built around the concept of learning within a community. The result is a vibrant supportive community that helps all students to become vibrant, self-sufficient, and active learners who can articulate their growing personal and global awareness through varying modes of self-expression. Among other things, students engage in field experiences including land-based study and service to others.

The after-school Studios and the Virtues Project further engage students in the life of the community and the world beyond. Through the Middle Years Programme, students are involved in campus management, community-based research studies, and service-learning projects. Some of these activities take place through community partnerships and in a variety of settings such as university campuses, museums, industries, government centers, art studios, and nonprofit organizations.

Rochester, Minnesota

Rochester is a growing, vibrant small city south of Minneapolis and St. Paul. With a population of just over 106,000, the city is best known as the home of the Mayo Clinic, among the largest and most well-respected medical facilities in the world. The city is also home to a major office of IBM and other corporations.

Overall, the city has long been rated as one of the best places to live in the United States. Rochester's revitalized downtown is also a major draw for residents and visitors—particularly the lively Historic Third Street, a popular hot spot featuring locally owned restaurants, bars, and shopping. There is little to no traffic, over 85 miles of paved recreational trails, and very nice parks to enjoy.

A new major effort is currently underway to turn Rochester into a global destination for health and wellness. With Mayo Clinic at its heart, Destination Medical Center (DMC) is a unique 20-year economic development initiative. The \$5.6 billion plan is the largest in Minnesota's history and the catalyst for growth in Rochester. When complete, the project will touch every aspect of life in Rochester from medicine to business to education to recreation and culture.

With its constant rating as one of the best places in America to live and work coupled with the new initiative to further improve and grow the city, Rochester is an ideal community in which to live and work.

Strengths of the School

Among the many strengths of the school the new Head will find are:

- The first thing out of everyone's mouth is the wonderful, close sense of community. Between the overall size of the school, the multi-age elementary classes where guides spend multiple years with their students and really get to know them, and the overall caring of parents, a sense of warmth has been a long-time standout of the RMS culture.
- An amazingly culturally diverse student body. In fact, the front of the school has a lineup of the flags representing all the countries to which students trace their heritages.
- A commitment to Montessori philosophy and a faculty of guides and assistants who are lauded for their commitment to and connection with their students. Most guides have AMS training; some have AMI training. And while the school is officially connected to neither AMS nor AMI, Montessori is deeply ingrained in the educational program.
- Music, art, and ecology are important parts of grade level programs, as well as included in the menu of after-school options that many students enjoy.
- A 15-acre campus with ample indoor learning spaces and plenty of outdoor land for ecology classes and recreation.
- A supportive and engaged parent body.
- Rochester, Minnesota is one of the best places to live in the country. The first LEED Gold city in the state, rated as one of the top three most innovative cities in the country, it attracts exactly the kind of families who favor Montessori for their children.
- A wise and engaged board of directors, committed to a bright future for the school.

Challenges and Opportunities

- The most obvious challenge will be adapting to the post-COVID world in virtually every aspect of the school.
- With four distinct divisions of the school (Toddlers, Children's House, E1 – lower elementary, E2 – upper elementary, and middle school), it is an ongoing challenge to knit the school together with a common vision rooted in Montessori principles and practice, a common culture, and a sense of "one school."
- While both Montessori and IB-MYP approaches are certainly whole-child-focused, there is also an expectation of academic excellence that needs to run through the culture of the school.
- The school would benefit from policies and procedures clearly articulated and uniformly applied.
- Like many schools, RMS would benefit from increased enrollment both programmatically and financially. The school needs to more actively market itself externally to become better known in the Rochester community for the gem of a school that it is. In particular, more education about Montessori would be helpful to parents' ability to be ambassadors for the school.
- While 50 years old, RMS lacks a culture of philanthropy that is often found in independent schools, and which can provide an important supplement to tuition revenue.
- While the school has appropriately invested resources in child-facing personnel, it would benefit from an administration structured for professional operations and clarity of communications, as well as fiscal prudence.

- Morale and the strong sense of community have been impacted by a number of factors, including recent staff turnover and the disruption of COVID-19.

Desired Skills and Attributes

Among the skills and personal attributes desirable in candidates are:

- A passion for children and experience with the 18 months through eighth grade age ranges.
- Familiarity with Montessori education, or a commitment to become fully educated about Montessori.
- A bridge-builder skilled in uniting community by knitting together all constituencies around a common child-focused vision. Ability to set a “tone at the top” of warmth, inclusivity, collaboration, collegiality, mutual respect, and a sense of common purpose.
- Experience with the “business-side” aspects of school leadership including finance, marketing, fundraising, and working with a board.
- A track record of successful hiring, evaluating, supporting, and developing excellent teachers and staff.
- A passion for diversity and multi-culturalism both in the demographics of the school population and being integral to the school program.
- An inclusive and collaborative leader who also can be decisive and consistent and can instill a culture of accountability.
- A charismatic face of the school who can tell the RMS “story” externally in clear and compelling ways, to both build enrollment and further cement RMS as a treasure of the greater RMS community.

To Apply

Interested and qualified candidates should submit electronically in one email and as separate documents (preferably PDFs) the following materials:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- A one-page statement of educational or leadership philosophy and practice;
- A list of five professional references with name, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate’s permission) to:

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