

Our school has grown. We have become a unique place using a blend of instructional strategies.
We want our name to speak to the full, diverse range of students who benefit from our program.
We want our students to be aware of their expanding opportunities and responsibilities.

Announcing the...

CUSHNOC ACADEMY AT STEPPING STONES

~A program of Stepping Stones Montessori School for Grades 4-8~

Rooted in the Kennebec Area

We are located in the heart of Kennebec Valley, close to the Kennebec River. One of the earlier names of the Kennebec area was pronounced "Cushnoc" by the Native Americans. We encourage our students to know the history of themselves, their families, the area, and ultimately the world.

Traders of Knowledge and Sharers of Friendship

Everybody has a skill, an art, knowledge, and friendship to share. We value each person's gifts, even when the person is different from us. The Native Americans and Europeans traded goods and knowledge with one another at the historic Cushnoc Trading Post. They found a way to share what they had. This challenge is ours as well. *"In ye most convenientest place for trade..."* - William Bradford said of the Kennebec area.

Stewards of the Earth

A name of Native American origin seems fitting for our school's ideals. Native Americans knew and loved the land; they used the Kennebec River and adjoining tributaries/streams for transportation, setting up camp, and agriculture. The name Cushnoc also means "head of tide." In all of our studies, we want to be at the "head of the tide," especially in our knowledge, our skills, and our care for the earth. We put special emphasis on knowledge of the outdoors, green practices, and gardening/animal husbandry.

Why a name change?

With time we have developed a program that is Montessori based, but is not exclusively Montessori focused. Through informed experience (since starting our Upper Elementary Program) we have refined the Program to be a gradual transition into more traditional curriculum elements and structures. An example is averaged letter grades (at the student's individual working level) in grades 5 and up. Another example is our rigorous Middle School Program with several traditional academic elements.

We stand by these gradual changes because as students develop, they can adjust to new educational approaches. Varied, well-researched educational approaches, activities, and grading systems provide solid experience for the future. For example, the averaged letter grades give older students a new kind of feedback. Maria Montessori believed in students being trained in the expectations of the culture in which children will eventually find themselves..

Those versed in the Montessori approach understand that Montessori learning provides a high level of challenge at all age levels, but, unfortunately, the typical lay person does not know "Montessori" to be more than an early learning program. We as directors run into this misperception frequently. "Oh, a Montessori school. So you run a daycare." Or, "My granddaughter went to a Montessori nursery school too." Even when people have discovered that Montessori is more than an early learning program, there is a tendency for the outsider to think of Montessori as "alternative" or mainly for students who need hands-on activities. Yes, Montessori *is* an alternative to traditional programs, and it *does* help those who need hands-on activities. However, Montessori is *as or even more* effective for typical and high performing learners as well.

Our staff has weighed the advantages and disadvantages of continuing to name our Grades 4-8 program "Stepping Stones Montessori School," which contains a frequently misunderstood term. We have concluded that by using the

word "Montessori" in the title we may not be attracting the full range of families who may otherwise consider our school. Nor does the original name fully describe our many program elements to our current clientele and students in the older grades.

Are we still a Montessori school? Yes! We are not making a curriculum or philosophy change; we are adopting a name that better suits our Grades 4-8 program. We will maintain the multi aged groupings, emphasis on mastery, individualized instruction, and hands-on materials in combination with symbolic work. We continue to make science, history, and geography high priorities. We continue to encourage different learning styles and individual interests. We hope that this name change will help to set a tone of high expectations for the current older students as well as more correctly label the range of methods we use.

"Cushnoc Academy at Stepping Stones" is a part of our overall school, "Stepping Stones Montessori School," the official name of the school. Cushnoc Academy refers specifically to our Grades 4-8 programs and you may continue to use the overall school name wherever you would like. In daily conversation, we will use "Cushnoc Academy" when referring to Grades 4-8.