

CLARK MONTESSORI
PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LIFE BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL
By, Elizabeth Conkin

After years of receiving a Bronze Medal from the US News and World Report, Clark Montessori has joined the list of Silver Medal public high schools throughout the country. Although most think the rating is an indicator of how good a school is in educating its students, the formula US News and World Report uses may suggest otherwise.

The first two steps in the US News and World Report's assessment are:

- Does the school serve all its students well?
- Does the population within the school of economically disadvantaged students perform better than their statistical expectations?

Marta Donahoe asks, "Why wouldn't students who attend schools in which there is an entrance exam be expected to do better than their statistical counterparts?" Donahoe, Co-Founder of Clark Montessori and Executive Director of Cincinnati Montessori Secondary Education Program, says, "I would expect any school with students who test-in to qualify for the Olympics of High Schools because they are a school of good test-takers, even though this highly-prized aspect has nothing to do with success and happiness in the real world." National Association for College Admission Counseling, *Defining Promise: Optional Standardized Testing Policies in American College and University Admissions*, 2014 (no correlation between high SAT or ACT scores and success in college).

As the only truly integrated high school in Cincinnati with no test-in requirement, all students at Clark Montessori tend to perform better than their statistical expectations. According to Donahoe, this is because the teachers, with help from parents, have created an infrastructure for their students to be successful, hardworking and deeply thoughtful.

The third step in the US New and World Report assessment is:

- Are the students college-ready?

To assess this element, US New and World Report uses only data from Advanced Placement courses. Although AP Courses are rigorous, content-driven and rely heavily on memorization, they should be only one small way in which those three aspects are addressed. See <http://excellencewithoutap.org>.

College-readiness is not something a student can achieve by taking an AP class or testing out of a college course. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/04/26/study-ap-program-isnt-all-its-cracked-up-to-be>. According to Donahoe, any great high school teacher knows the most valuable courses in a school are those that require the greatest skill and creativity on the part of the teacher. "AP courses are fast-paced to cover lots of content. They do not allow time for teaching in-depth, for calling on the critical thinking of every student or for wrangling

with ideas and provocative issues that create the kind of soulful citizenry we are nurturing at Clark Montessori.”

At Clark Montessori, college-readiness is achieved by guiding students to be hard-workers, thoughtful citizens and inspired and hopeful young adults, who interact respectfully and skillfully with persons of all ages and backgrounds as they negotiate their way to college and the rest of the world around them. That is why all core classes at Clark Montessori are honors level, which give teachers the opportunity to cover the subject in depth while still having flexibility to respond to students’ interest and excitement in the topics being addressed.

Maria Montessori called for all of us to embody the notion our children are the heirs to a progression of the human spirit. Donahoe believes if Clark Montessori students, parents and teachers can embrace that idea, we will continue in our own way to prepare students not only for college, but also for life.