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The Walden Way

From preschool to eighth grade, **The Walden School** shapes students into confident, capable, and curious learners who are ready to embrace the challenges ahead.

Ethan Delamon came to The Walden School as a fourth grader. As his mother, Estella Neyema, reflects on the transition, she describes it as “one of the best decisions we’ve ever made for him.”

“I’ve seen remarkable growth in him over the years, both as a learner and as a young man,” she adds. “I’ve seen him become more confident and well-spoken, and I think it’s a testament to the thoughtfulness and availability that his teachers can dedicate to him.”

Ethan is now in his final year at Walden. The environment of safety, respect, and independence at The Walden School has helped him grow academically, socially, and emotionally. Just as important, his mother says he has been able to truly enjoy his childhood, even as the world around him seems to encourage children to grow up too quickly.

The Walden School, which is based in Media,

provides a Montessori-style education for boys and girls from preschool to eighth grade. Developed by Italian educator and physician Maria Montessori, the Montessori educational model emphasizes personal discovery, independent learning, and respect for all aspects of a child’s development. The model inspired Mary LeFever, a former public school teacher who fell in love with Dr. Montessori’s approach, to found The Walden School in 1967.

In other words, The Walden School has spent the past 56 years acting as a sanctuary of sorts, where students learn through independent and self-directed activities, as well as by working closely with their peers. By giving students the freedom to choose how they learn best, Walden enables them to develop a natural curiosity that helps foster a lifelong love of learning.

There may be no one more qualified to com-

ment on the value of Walden’s approach than Elyse Kirkpatrick. Having joined the school in 1985, shortly after graduating from Penn State University, Kirkpatrick has been a Walden teacher for nearly 40 years.

“The teaching itself is gratifying because I get to teach students for multiple years,” she says. “I get to know them deeply, both personally and academically, seeing them grow not just over a year but over several years. At the heart of everything Walden does is the question, ‘Is it good for the child?’ That’s why I went into teaching: to make learning and the school experience ‘good’ for children.”

Teachers such as Kirkpatrick strive to make sure each student feels cared for and respected, which in turn helps confidence bloom in young learners. By encouraging students’ curiosity, Walden teachers help children to be unafraid of

asking questions, though always in a respectful manner. Such skills will serve students well long after they have exited Walden's doors for the last time.

Because Walden's low student-to-teacher ratio enables educators to get to know each student's strengths, weaknesses, and preferred learning style, educators will know precisely how and when to offer the instruction a student might need to flourish. This guidance-based culture helps students adapt as they progress, particularly as they enter adolescence—considered one of the most challenging transitions in a child's educational journey.

"For students, just having a few teachers who know them deeply, rather than many teachers who only know them on the surface, makes this time of their life so much easier to navigate," Kirkpatrick adds. "The smaller class sizes and length of time many students have been together have led to classes having a feel of being a family. Everyone is accepted for who they are, making the time of discovery and growth much easier."

'The Best Is Yet to Come'

The Walden School takes its name from the tranquil pond made famous by Henry David Thoreau. The moniker seems to fit well considering the calmness and open-mindedness found in its classrooms, each of which is directed by two Walden teachers, or co-teachers.

Academics aside, the curriculum emphasizes the art of positive communication and conflict resolution, both of which are essential to a child's emotional development. Walden students from different grades interact freely; in fact, all of Walden's classrooms combine students from multiple grades. These multi-age classrooms create a dynamic in which younger students learn from their older peers, and vice versa.

"It's not just the older students who are leaders," Kirkpatrick adds. "Anyone can take that role, and because students frequently work and play with different-aged students, younger students are comfortable rising up and taking a leadership role."

Haley Kerby is in her second year as a counselor at The Walden School. A desire to "make authentic human connections" inspired her to pursue a career in the field, so she feels right at home in a culture in which every team member shows genuine interest in the wellbeing of each student.

"We work as a team every day to meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of every student," she adds. "We literally meet as a team to discuss the strengths and areas of growth for every student in the building, and formulate plans to help them succeed. But what I feel is one of the most important things we do at Walden is to create a safe, loving, and peaceful environment for students to grow in, which is essential for any real learning to take place."

Kerby plays a key role in each child's social and emotional learning. As part of her responsibilities, she visits each classroom twice a month to teach LifeSkills, a class designed to help students build healthy relationships. This year, the



Open Houses at The Walden School

Prospective families can visit The Walden School, and meet Head of School Bob Thomas, the admin team, and teachers during its Admissions Open Houses.

- Sunday, November 5, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
- Saturday, January 6, from 10 a.m. to noon



Personal tours are also available. Reach the Admissions Office at info@thewaldenschool.org.



first life skill she will focus on is friendship, which is essential to nurturing a child's social skills.

"My personal philosophy of school counseling begins and ends with grace and a willingness to be a part of a student's journey," she adds. "A relationship can only be cultivated with a student when that student feels that I have his, her, or their best interest at heart. ... I see my work as an honor [and] an opportunity to work with young people, and walk with them through their struggles and also experience their joys."

Estella Neyema vouches for the Walden way. The school has helped her son Ethan become a more confident, capable, and articulate version of himself by almost every metric imaginable.

He even likes to share his experience by representing the school at open-house events.

"At Walden, Ethan can be himself: a happy-go-lucky kid who likes to ask a lot of questions," Neyema says. "I honestly believe and know 100 percent that Ethan is ready to face the high school of his choice. He has matured tremendously, which makes me proud and confident that Walden has prepared him for higher education, and that the best is yet to come." ■

The Walden School

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