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Montessori hosts Russian educators

Montessori Magnet School showcased its unique educational philosophy for Russian educators during a visit sponsored by the Albany Tula Alliance.

The December visit focused on the Montessori educational method and how its goals fit into New York state's standardized education goals.

Based on the work of Maria Montessori, the method is based on cultivating students' natural desire to learn and allows students to make choices in the classroom. Early tasks are used to develop concentration, coordination, attention to detail, independence and respect.



Montessori teacher Jannine Walton (left) discusses math journals a tour of the school by Russian educators. Principal Kenneth Lein is at right.

In the Montessori setting, the goal is to develop the tools for learning to maximize future learning.

Before going on a tour of the school, principal Kenneth Lein and teachers Maggie Fuller, Ed.D., and Deanna Carras discussed with the Russian educators the strategies they implement in the classroom. An engaging two-way conversation developed between the American and Russian educators; indeed, it was a “learning process” for both groups.

Mr. Lein then led a tour of multi-age classrooms (pre-K-K and 1-2).

In the 1-2 classroom of Mrs. Carras and Jannine Walton, Mrs. Carras explained the school's use of National Urban Alliance techniques, which aim to build students' intellect through connecting culture, language and cognition. Mrs. Walton talked with the visiting educators about her use of math journals, which provide reinforcement and review for students and serve as informal formative assessments.

Assistant Director of Special Education Michele Bridgewater also discussed the district's programs for students with disabilities, including the rise of autism rates, the structure of Albany's Special Education Department, the training and development of special education teachers in the United States, the diagnosis of disabilities in students, assessment tools and practices for students with disabilities, and placement.

The Russian educators were impressed by the level of peer interaction and inclusion students with disabilities enjoyed in the district. In Russia, the visitors said that students with disabilities normally are home schooled – meaning specialty teachers visit the homes of students with disabilities.

Other topics discussed included early childhood education, grading systems, school and district organization, and magnet schools.

Barbara Jancar Webster, Ph.D., distinguished SUNY professor emerita, served as a liaison for the group. A former professor of international relations and Eurasian and East European politics at SUNY Brockport, Dr. Webster's knowledge of Russian society and the Russian language were helpful in promoting the success of this educational project. Inna Kogaeva also served as a translator.

Founded in 1991, the Albany Tula Alliance is a sister-city program that supports numerous educational, cultural, health, environmental and economic partnerships between the Capital Region and Russia's Tula oblast, or region.