INSIGHT FROM
MontessoriPublic.org
BRINGING MONTESSORI INTO THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION IN PRINT AND ONLINE • EXCERPTED FROM: **FALL 2026 (VOL. 11, #1)**

Middle school breaks new ground in Tulsa

Veteran public Montessori organizer moves into adolescent work



ANDREW MARSHALL WITH
DIANE BECKHAM

When Tempo Montessori opens its doors in Tulsa next August, it will be the only public Montessori secondary school in Oklahoma.

"I'm just continuing my passion for providing access to high quality Montessori for all kids," said Tempo's Diane Beckham, who helped the Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) district open three public Montessori programs between 2018 and 2023. Those programs were also unique—when they launched, they represented the first and only public Montessori options in the state of Oklahoma.

Now, with Tempo, Beckham is hoping to continue that momentum, this time with older students in mind. Beckham said the move is long overdue and much sought after by the community.

"When I opened those other schools for Tulsa Public, a question I always got on tours, even [from parents of young children], was, 'Is there a secondary? Is there a middle school option for a Montessori?'... It was really the families that were driving it. Tulsa has struggled in the middle school landscape with choice," Beckham said, referring to Tulsa as an educational region and not Tulsa Public Schools specifically. "Montessori is a very different experience for middle school and high school, very experiential, working at your own level, exploring your passions, those types of things."

For student recruitment, she and her board are targeting the east side of Tulsa, where access to public Montessori doesn't currently exist, and utilizing a "mobile classroom" to spread the word about what Montessori has to offer.

The mobile classroom is a 16-foot trailer decked out with Montessori materials and designed to make a splash at community events. Allowing children and their parents to explore the classroom showcases the Montessori method and combats the haze of misapprehensions that can still follow the philosophy in the minds of the general public.

"Because when you hear Montessori, there's misconceptions. [Parents] think it's something that it's not," Beckham said. "What's really cool is when the kids come in and they just start working off the shelf. I've always said that Montessori, the philosophy and the way we do education, is sold by the children. The kids are just kind of showing their parents right on the spot what it looks like if they were in that classroom. That's pretty cool."

But it's not just a wrong idea of Montessori that Beckham's mobile classroom is combating.

"We have families here in Tulsa that still have no idea what Montessori education is, or it's always been seen as the private school that they could never afford," she said.

Expanded learning

Tempo Montessori has been two years in the making, three by the time it opens next school year (Tempo's board is in the process of locking down a location as of this writing.)

Beckham said that her experience opening public Montessori schools with TPS prepared her for the task of going the charter route.

"Realizing that I can't achieve everything my first year, even though I have that vision," was crucial, Beckham said. "Just really learning to go slow and at a steady pace so that we can build correctly from the early years."

In that vein, Tempo will also launch with pre-k and kindergarten cohorts. That's to ensure that the school's adolescent program has a healthy pool of potential recruits on hand.

When the school does open, it will leverage proximity to downtown Tulsa in support of its adolescent students.

"There's a lot in Tulsa that children can experience, such as their arts district. We have great STEM and STEAM opportunities. So there's a lot … for kids to not only experience but expand their learning," she said.

Tempo's year-round calendar is designed to give its students more time to participate in that expanded learning, and is a selling point for the school, according to Beckham.

"These things are not outside the range of 'normal' for Montessori adolescent programming," Beckham said. "But the charter route allows me to have the flexibility to actually do those things."

Tempo's target enrollment is 150 students for the first year, with the aim of eventually expanding to 500. And in 2030, the plan is to open a high school. That's where Beckham's thirty years of Montessori experience and program opening comes in. She's already thinking ahead—even though the high school doesn't exist yet.

"We are doing some backwards

continues >

planning all the way down from what our high schoolers need, so that we can ensure that we're doing the right work starting in sixth grade," she said.

When Beckham first discovered Montessori, back in the 90's, she said to herself, "I only want to be a principal at a Montessori public school." And she set out to make that happen, earning a master's in administration and a master's in Montessori education.

But over the years, that goal expanded, in part, she said, because of where she was when she was first exposed to Montessori.

"We were a 100% poverty school… just really deep trauma. I just saw the amazing work of Montessori in that [environment]. I learned those lessons early on, and that drives my passion," she said.

Tempo Montessori is currently accepting applications from all families in the greater Tulsa area.

Diane Beckham is the Executive Director of Tempo Montessori.

Andrew Marshall is a Communications Specialist for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

MontessoriPublic

MontessoriPublic, the communications and advocacy platform for public Montessori is a publication of

NATIONAL CENTER for MONTESSORI in the PUBLIC SECTOR

Subscribe at montessoripublic.org

Noncommercial reproduction of this material is permitted and encouraged. Consult authors for rights to copyrighted articles.

Copyright 2026 National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector