

## Schools encourage social growth

Children need a social atmosphere to develop mentally and socially, which prepares them for higher education

**T**he Sun's Aug. 30 feature "Adjusting to Campus," by Dennis Culver, addressed many concerns adolescent students face in middle school.

I know what he said to be true because this is the time of year that students often transfer into our small middle school program after trying unsuccessfully to transition into the larger public school model.

I would like to shed some light on the developmental stage called adolescence and show why a small middle school has an easier time addressing these specific learners.

To begin with, most sixth grade students are preadolescent.

Their needs are more adequately addressed in an elementary model.



**CHRISTINA MILLER**

Adolescence typically begins well into the sixth-grade year.

For all students, regardless of their age or developmental stage, trust and safety are paramount in a learning environment.

The issues of trust and safety, however, are magnified to an adolescent child.

Adolescent students can only learn in a socially and emotionally safe learning environment.

Those of you parenting an adolescent child know the emotional roller coaster only too well.

The heightened levels of embarrassment, fear, hurt feelings, and isolation can render your child immobile and shut down his or her ability to learn.

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## SCHOOLS: Children need a social environment to learn and develop

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A small middle school can create a unique learning environment that would be difficult in a much larger setting.

For example, because we are small, we can easily implement many well-researched best practices that honor this specific developmental stage.

A multi-age classroom is one best practice that allows for an appropriate amount of liberty, creating a micro-society.

Multi-age groupings foster team teaching, cooperative learning, and less elimination of grade retention.

Continuity is promoted along with the development of a very different level of relationship between children and their teachers, as well as children and their peers.

Academically speaking, a curriculum for adolescents should offer a broad view of the world in a thematic approach presenting ideas in an interconnected format.

At this stage of development, students are able to use critical thinking skills and cooperative learning that involves real life experiences.

This is easily accomplished in a small and intimate setting.

Socialization develops easily in this format because it fosters a closely-knit social atmosphere based on kindness, trust and mutual respect.

This provides the students with an emotionally safe learning environment necessary for a smooth transition from childhood into adult society and is a unique aspect of a small, developmentally based middle school program.

*Christina Miller is President of the Millhopper Montessori School, Inc. The Gainesville school serves children from age two through the eighth grade.*