

THE BEST OF THE USAS IB ACCREDITED SCHOOLS 2016

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT THE WESTWOOD SCHOOL

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THE WESTWOOD SCHOOL

Imagine a school where every student is an individual and where the curriculum they follow is balanced, challenging and based upon their personal talents and aspirations, making their education a unique and yet also a shared experience. You are imagining The Westwood School in north Dallas, Texas. A non-profit, private pre-K through 12 school, Westwood has blazed the trail in education in many ways. Established 30 years ago as a pre-K through 8 Montessori School, it expanded to include a High School in 2008 and became the first Montessori School in North America to adopt the IB program both in the Middle and High Schools. Emphasis is placed upon the **use** rather than the acquisition of knowledge making the transition from Montessori to IB natural. It is one of the very few schools in America where every student undertakes the full Diploma Program, irrespective of learning styles or abilities. There is no "academic elitism" at Westwood for the school believes that every student should be exposed to the holistic richness that is the Diploma Program. Their academic results and college acceptances confirm that the inclusivity of Westwood is a successful educational model. Students traditionally score considerably above the IB world average despite the school not selecting out of such an academically demanding program with Westwood recently being recognized by the Confucius Institute in Beijing as one of the top 10 Mandarin programs in the world and being recognized as the top 1A school in Texas by TAPPS. College placements are impressive with students attending in-state, out-of-state and international universities. Among their extensive acceptances are UT Austin, Fordham University, Carnegie Mellon, Georgetown, NYU, Washington University St. Louis, European Institute of Art & Design and many other international universities. In addition to college placements, Westwood students receive a considerable amount of credit hours and scholarship offers, with almost \$2 million being awarded to their graduates to date.



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Westwood is not simply an academic school. Although small by public school standards, their student body represents over 45 nationalities and the students enjoy the full "high school experience." Each season offers a full range of sports supported by their nationally recognized Cheer Squad, with students winning many medals in state competitions. Each division of the school performs in an annual musical production in which all students participate and there are numerous competitions such as Future City, Mock Trial, Model United Nations and many more. The highlight of the year is the Adventure Leadership Program (ALPS) where the students take their studies outdoors to either a city or the wilderness. As one student recounted: " *Sleeping under the stars, seeing the Milky Way and removing three days of dirt and mud under a natural waterfall in the Grand Canyon is something I shall treasure for the rest of my life.* "

Westwood's philosophy that the journey is more important than the destination exposes children to as many opportunities as possible, enriches their lives and allows them to discover latent talents that might otherwise never be developed. The school's motto of **Character, Community, Excellence** is not something that is glibly recited at appropriate moments throughout the year. Westwood lives and breathes their motto. Emphasis is placed upon the character of individuals such that students are expected to do the right thing, not because they are monitored or cajoled, but because it **is** the right thing to do. By developing good character traits, the sense of community naturally occurs. Students and their families are involved in many community activities such as the Middle School Shakespeare

play, fund raising events (Walk for Water and their student operated coffee shop, IBeanery) and a host of parent educational events. The partnership between school, students and parents creates an environment where excellence is a natural product. The nature of Westwood was best summarized during a recent re-accreditation visit. A member of the accrediting team summarized his views as: "the final judge of a school is to ask oneself if I would send my children here. The answer to that is YES! – in a heartbeat."

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