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## Freedom and discipline

**Montessori concepts with special meaning for African-Americans**



BY DAWN BRADLEY

Freedom and discipline are key elements in the Montessori method: every Montessori program practiced with fidelity allows for freedom. When I observed a Montessori classroom for the first time, I was struck by the children's freedom of movement and choice. I wondered how the teacher maintained order if the children were allowed to do whatever they chose? In my training, I learned that the child is given freedom only after he has garnered the discipline to treat the materials respectfully. Students are able to move through the classroom because the guide has given extensive control of movement lessons. The child is only allowed to choose a material after he/she has had a lesson. Freedom and discipline walk hand in hand in Montessori

pedagogy. Montessori said that children showed her "freedom and discipline are two faces of the same medal, because scientific freedom leads to discipline."

But freedom and discipline are loaded words in the African-American household. Coming from the perspective of an enslaved people in a so-called "free world", and literally being chained and treated as beasts of burden, freedom is seen through a cracked lens. Enslaved Africans were beaten and denigrated to force their submission to their masters. Having been exposed to no other way, beatings became the standard of discipline for many African-Americans.

My family was no exception. There was never a moment in my childhood when I felt unloved or unsafe with my parents. However, I was corporally punished when I misbehaved. My father is a gentle, loving, kind, and generous man. But when I made poor choices he would give me a "whooping." He said he had to do it to protect me. With a genuinely pained expression he'd say, "This hurts me more than it hurts you, I just don't know what else to do," words I knew his mother had said to him. My experience wasn't unique among my African-American friends. We all had



*The only true discipline is self-discipline*

stories to tell, and war wounds to share. None of us felt abused—in fact, we felt wrapped in love within our southern, two-parent, middle-class community. But being hit did make me feel disrespected. It chipped at my dignity, and self-confidence. Still, I know my parents simply adhered to the adage, "spare the rod and spoil the child." They did what they thought was best.

Black parents have often issued corporal punishment to keep children "in

line" and more importantly to maintain their safety. When I was a girl, my grandmother would relive the days when her five boys and two girls were children. The stories I enjoyed the most were about my mischievous uncles and how she sometimes had to "go out back and grab her switch." After one story in which two of my uncles caused an exceptional ruckus she said "I had to beat

*continues on page 16 >*

## MPPI interviews public policy makers

**What leaders and public officials want the Montessori world to know**



BY DENISE MONNIER, JAMILAH R. JOR'DAN, AND WILLIAM C. SMITH

As advocates for policy change in support of Montessori education, we focus a lot of energy on policy makers. We talk about meeting them, educating them, volunteering to serve on advisory boards and committees with them, and hopefully convincing them to make policy changes in favor of our programs.

Sometimes we are appealing to policy makers who have little knowledge of Montessori education, or even have had negative impressions of what we do. Sometimes we know that policy makers themselves have Montessori experiences with their own families, but have not been able to bring those experiences to public education reform. Sometimes we are able to join forces with policy makers who fervently support Montessori education. The Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI) recently spoke with two such figures who shared their stories and viewpoints on advocacy.

Jamilah R. Jor'dan serves as the Deputy Director of the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development. There, she supports the development and implementation of early childhood

policy across multiple state agencies. In addition, her efforts focus on strengthening interagency and community collaboration by developing and maintaining relationships with other agencies, family and community organizations.

Maryland State Senator William C. Smith was re-elected in the 2018 election cycle and is the first African-American to represent Montgomery County. In the Senate, Senator Smith has worked to forge relationships with his colleagues from across the state and political spectrum which has allowed him to become an effective legislator in Annapolis. As a Vice-Chair of the Judicial Proceedings Committee, Smith has championed robust criminal justice reform measures,

*continues on page 17 >*



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# Montessori inspired?

Reaching back to the original inspiration



BY DAVID AYER

“Montessori inspired.”

It’s a widely used term that still raises some hackles.

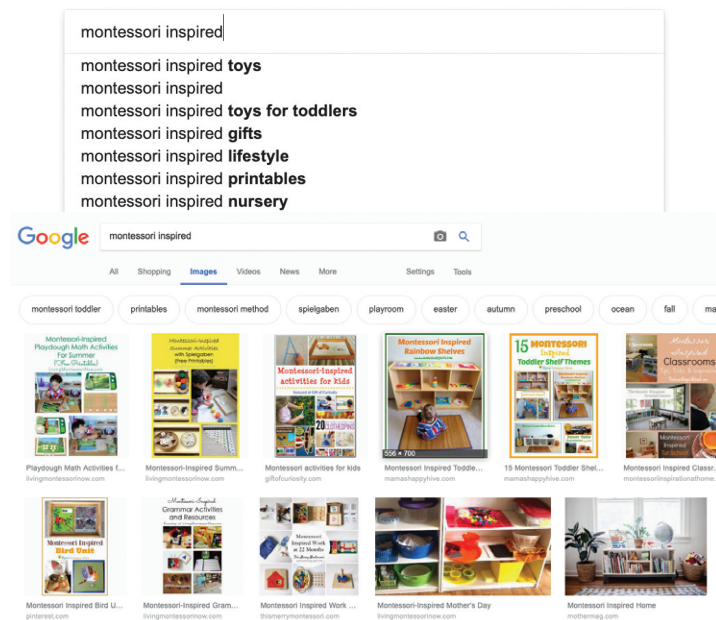
“True-blue” Montessorians turn up their noses at the phrase a bit, probably because it’s often found attached to things that don’t seem to have much to do with what Montessori is really all about.

But it’s actually a good measure for what Montessori means to the wider world: toddlers, activities, classrooms, and printables; definitely primary colors, shelves, baskets, and trays. Digging a little into the links, you’ll find some deeper connections: beauty, harmony, simplicity, and even independence and self-guided learning.

On a grander scale, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos recently announced a \$2B Day One Fund calling for “a network of high-quality, full-scholarship, Montessori-inspired preschools.” Bezos himself could be considered “Montessori-inspired,” as he attended a Montessori school as a young child. Still, the Montessori

world lit up with curiosity and, it must be admitted, some consternation and concern about what exactly he meant by the term. As we know, the name isn’t trademarked and anyone can use it, and Montessorians have experienced the full range of schools and programs that are “Montessori in name only” (MINO?), disparaged as “Monte-something”, or fully implemented down to the last golden bead. Can “Montessori-inspired” go deeper than the visual appeal and help children even if it stops short of full implementation? This is a challenging question with no pat answer.

In the public Montessori world, we sometimes see the term adopted by programs that are interested in the model but just getting started (“Montessori-curious?”), or are moving towards full implementation but aren’t there yet (“Montessori-aspiring?”), or are using some



Montessori inspired, according to the hive mind

Montessori elements and don’t plan to do any more. These are important distinctions. Montessori is inspiring, and to the extent educators are drawn into its fundamental principles, they should be helped along the way. Some elements of Montessori *can* be implemented without adopting the entire structure. Not so much the trays and materials—Montessori is much more than a clever way

*continues on page 18 >*

## MONTESSORI public

BRINGING MONTESSORI INTO THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION  
WINTER 2019  
VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2

- 1 **Freedom and discipline**  
DAWN BRADLEY
- 1 **MPPI interviews policy makers**  
DENISE MONNIER
- 3 **Montessori inspired?**  
DAVID AYER
- 4 **2019: The year of living emergently?**  
SAM CHALTAIN
- 6 **Assessment for human flourishing**  
NCMPS STAFF
- 8 **Montessori went down to Georgia**  
ANNIE FRAZER
- 10 **Starting a Montessori advocacy organization**  
DENISE MONNIER
- 11 **The Montessori opportunity**  
IHEOMA IRUKA
- 12 **The Montessori Census speaks**  
NCMPS STAFF
- 13 **Montessori Public Policy Initiative**  
WENDY SHENK-EVANS
- 19 **Puerto Rico recognizes Montessori**  
DAVID AYER
- 21 **MSJ comes to Portland**  
MSJ STAFF
- 22 **Montessori inclusion training in Milwaukee**  
DAVID AYER
- 23 **We need your voice!**
- 23 **THE PUBLIC CALENDAR**

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[editor@montessoripublic.org](mailto:editor@montessoripublic.org)

Article submission deadline **April 2, 2019**. More guidelines on page 23 of this issue.

## In this issue: Advocacy and policy

This issue of MontessoriPublic takes on policy and advocacy, asking what changes are needed to advance public Montessori, and how to accomplish them. Montessori news and developments and reports on NCMPS projects are covered as well.

**Dawn Bradley**, a founding Primary teacher at Libertas School of Memphis, shares a deeply personal take on freedom and discipline in the African-American community.

**Sam Chaltain**, an education-oriented writer, filmmaker, and advocate, returns to MontessoriPublic with an inspiring vision for social change.

**Annie Frazer**, Executive Director for Montessori Partnerships for Georgia, shares a collaborative success story.

**Iheoma Iruka**, Director of the High Scope Foundation’s Center for Early Education Research, champions Montessori early learning.

**Denise Monnier**, Director of State Advocacy for MPPI, offers two policy and advocacy analyses.

**Wendy Shenk-Evans**, Executive Director of MPPI, shares the origin and mission of the organization.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE OF MONTESSORIPUBLIC:

**Montessori inspired.** What does it mean?  
**Assessment for human flourishing:** NCMPS’ model for Montessori assessment.

**Montessori Census updates:** We’re learning more about the public Montessori world.

**Montessori in Puerto Rico:** A new Secretary of Montessori Education.

**Montessori for Social Justice comes to Portland, OR:** June 20–23, 2019.

**Montessori for Inclusion:** A European model with Montessori roots.



# 2019: The year of living emergently?

**There's a biological model for systemic change**



BY **SAM CHALTAIN**

We're doing it again.

2019 is barely a month old, yet everyone seems to be searching for the singular person, policy or program that can restore order and usher in the better world we seek. From the excitement over the looming presidential race (and the promise of a return to normalcy) to the anticipation of the pending Mueller report (and the vision of a president in handcuffs), we are hardwired to hope for the sweeping solution, the quick fix, the reset button.

## It's the songline of life itself—the deeply resonant story that flows through all living systems, including our own

In reality, life works differently. What if we started to work in closer accordance with life?

What if we made 2019 the year of living “emergently?”

Emergence is not a word we hear or use often, yet it is the dynamic origin of development, learning and evolution, and we see evidence of its existence in everything from our cells to our cities. Indeed, the conditions for emergence flow from the reciprocal relationship that exists between any living form and its environment. A single ant, following the chemical trail of its neighbors to carve out a vital, completely decentralized role in a teeming colony. An adaptive software system, seeking patterns in individual behavior that shape which banner ad you see. A human stem cell, self-organizing into increasingly more complicated structures based on the behavior of its neighbors. Or even a solitary Tunisian fruit vendor, whose decision to set himself ablaze eventually sets the entire Arab world on fire.

As Steven Johnson writes in his book on the subject, the capacity for emergent systems to learn and grow “derives from their adherence to low-level rules...

Emergent behaviors are all about living within the boundaries defined by rules, but also using that space to create something greater than the sum of its parts.”

In that sense, the central features of emergent systems outline a set of rules from the natural world that are both timeless and timely:

- Give and receive feedback.
- Pay attention to your closest neighbors.
- Seek order, not control.
- Start anywhere, and follow it everywhere.

It's the songline of life itself—the deeply resonant story that flows through all living systems, including our own. And in a world that is becoming increasingly interwoven, and at a moment in history when the promise and peril of artificial intelligence are becoming more than just a sci-fi script, our ability to shift to a more emergent way of

transformation in the direction we desire more likely.

It is literally that simple—and that complicated.

What, then, would it mean to make 2019 the year of living emergently?

For starters, it would mean resisting the urge to pin all of our hopes on any “singular solution.” Stop pretending that removing Donald Trump from office will restore a set of moral principles to American culture. Stop viewing ourselves as blameless pawns in someone else's end game. Stop waiting for someone else's policies to empower us to do our best work.

Start working where we can, how we can, with whom we can.

Although a better world depends on all of us, the work towards its creation begins with each of us. Transformation is first and foremost an inside job. And how we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale.

We see evidence of these principles in practice throughout the natural world—although perhaps in no more stirring form than a murmuration of starlings.

What words can do justice to the magic of as many as a million birds, flying and weaving as one?

Improvisatory choreography? Elegant chaos? Symphonic cacophony?

There is no familiar

way to make sense of this natural phenomenon—both what they do and how we feel when we see one. Yet this flocking behavior of the birds the ancient Romans believed foretold the will of the Gods—indeed, the word auspicious comes from the Latin *auspiciu*, or “divination by observing the flight of birds”—is a natural manifestation of a set of principles for organizing complex behavior, and an observable phenomenon that runs counter to the way we human beings have made sense of the world for as long as anyone can remember. And

thanks to the work of researchers, we now know that individual starlings all obey the same few flight rules:

- Watch your seven nearest neighbors.
- Fly toward each other, but don't crowd.
- If your neighbor turns, turn with them.

Why do they do this? According to one study, “when uncertainty in sensing is present, interacting with six or seven neighbors optimizes the balance between group cohesiveness and individual effort.” By following this rule of seven, the birds become part of a dynamic system in which each individual part combines to make a whole with emergent properties. This collective behavior allows the birds to gather information on their surroundings and self-organize toward an ideal density,

one in which optimal patterns of light and dark are produced that can deliver information to the entire flock (and protect them from predators). The closer each bird pays attention, the safer—and more cohesive—the entire flock becomes.

Of course, this sort of swarming behavior is not unique to starlings. Many different animals, from birds and insects to fish and mammals, have been observed in their own form of a swarm. So what can this behavior teach us about ourselves, our organizations, and our ability to change the story of the way we work and learn?

According to Andreas Weber, author of *The Biology of Wonder*, “the spirit of poetic ecology is the spirit of swarms. To understand the individual, we need to understand its environment, and each through the other. We have to think of beings always as interbeings.”

“We are a swarm ourselves,” Weber writes, “and we form swarms. A swarm

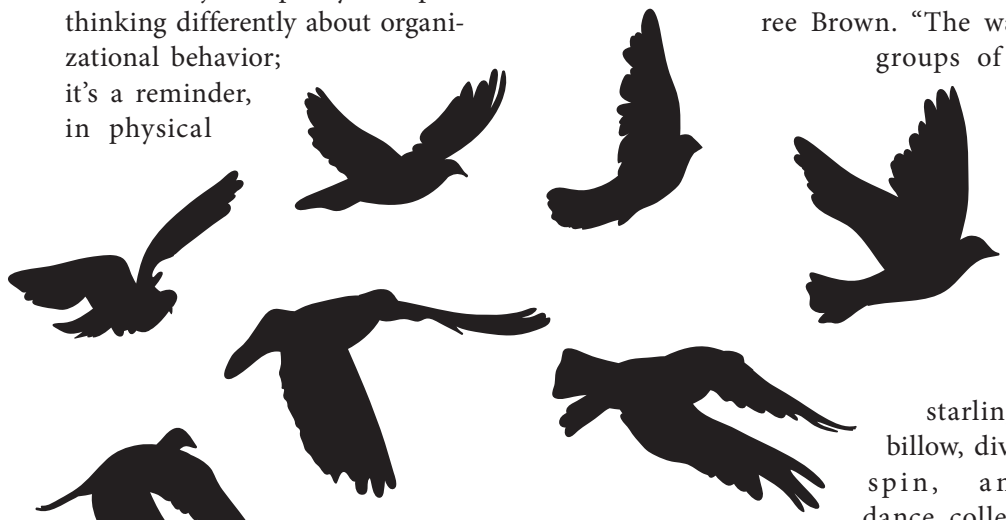


does not have intelligence; it is intelligence. In this respect, a swarm (or a murmuration) is an intensified counterpart of ourselves. It is what we are and what we try to imagine with our conscious thinking. Swarms are solidified feeling. The swarm is—and in its being living dynamics and their expression are welded together in one single gesture.”

In other words, a murmuration is more than just a pretty metaphor for thinking differently about organizational behavior; it’s a reminder, in physical

attack our most intractable rituals and assumptions about schooling, and usher in a different way of being that is more in line with both the modern world and the modern brain.

Applying these principles to the way we organize ourselves will change the way we feel and act. It may even change the way we dream. “My dream is a movement with such deep trust that we move as a murmuration,” says author and activist Adrienne Maree Brown. “The way groups of



form, that our own bodies, cultures and classrooms are governed by the same rules. As Weber puts it, “we see gestalts of the living that behave according to simple organic laws mirroring the great constellation that every living being has to cope with: to persist, to be close to the other, but not so close as to collide with him. These are the principles of poetic forms that are so thorough we can even teach them to a computer. They are the primary shapes of a poetics of living things.”

So let’s stop waiting for Godot. Let’s make 2019 the year of living emergently, and the year in which we plant a thousand Trojan horses — future seeds of creative destruction that can, when the time is right, assume a different form,

starlings billow, dive, spin, and dance collectively through the air. Each creature tuned in to its neighbors. There is a right relationship, a right distance between them—too close and they crash, too far away and they can’t feel the micro-adaptations of the other bodies. Each creature is shifting direction, speed and proximity based on the information of the other creatures’ bodies. Imagine our movements cultivating this type of trust and depth with each other, having strategic flocking in our playbooks.”

We can imagine. And we can flock more strategically—as soon as we recognize that the work begins with each of us, at the scale of the individual, now.

*Sam Chaltain is a DC-based school designer, writer, filmmaker, and father. You can reach him at [sam@wonderbydesign.org](mailto:sam@wonderbydesign.org) or [samchaltain.com](http://samchaltain.com)*

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# Assessment for human flourishing

## A new model of assessment for a century-old model of education

BY NCMPS STAFF

*The following is an excerpt from the upcoming NCMPS Assessment Playbook, a collection of tools and strategies for assessment in public Montessori programs, available this spring at the NCMPS Public Montessori Symposium, March 20-21, in Washington, D.C. Information and registration at [public-montessori.org/symposium](http://public-montessori.org/symposium).*

Here's a problem that has dogged Montessori educators for nearly two decades:

*How do we implement Montessori faithfully within an educational system that uses standardized testing as the primary means of ensuring accountability for schools and families?*

Standardized testing has been part of American educational culture since the turn of the 20th century, but in recent decades schools—both public and independent—have been acutely affected by the assumptions that govern the current accountability regime and the testing industry that both feeds and profits from that regime. Parents, public officials, and policymakers demand proof that students are learning at acceptable levels. Test developers aim to create instruments that are valid, reliable, and deployable at scale. And because evidence of learning is defined almost exclusively by achievement on a narrow range of measures, tests, testing, and the process of enabling more students to test better has come to define what it means to go to school.

## The demands associated with standardized testing have narrowed the educational experience of students

Few educators—Montessori or otherwise—are happy about this condition. Indeed, assessment, at least as it is currently configured, sends shivers down the spines of most teachers. Two issues predominate. First, the demands associated with standardized testing have narrowed the educational experience

of students. Second, analyzing spreadsheets, strategizing about growth, and customizing lessons for the sake of the tests has added to the ever-expanding job description for teachers. For a growing number of teachers, this combination has proven to be untenable, and not just for Montessori. A 2014 NEA study reports that nearly half of U.S. teachers consider leaving the profession due to standardized testing.

For Montessori teachers, the impact may be even greater. When surveyed, public Montessori educators (leaders as well as teachers) identify the current assessment culture as one of their most significant challenges, along with funding and staffing. Reconciling an emphatically child-centered pedagogy with an assessment system that, by design, is all about transmission, efficiency, and sorting is a confounding proposition. Add race, socioeconomic status and equity to the mix and the challenges grow even more complex. When human flourishing is the goal, and when obvious and persistent disparities that correlate with race and income exist, and when addressing those disparities is measured, largely, by tests that ignore the goal of human flourishing, what's a socially-minded educator to do?

At NCMPS, we believe that human flourishing rather than achievement --as defined by standardized tests-- should be the goal of education. By human flourishing we mean the capacity to thrive socially, emotionally, intellectually and economically, to participate meaningfully in family, community, and civic life, to live a life of curiosity, agency, and satisfaction. Human flourishing means, as Maria Montessori put it, "becoming a person of one's time and place," with the means and wherewithal not only to

function within, but to shape society. Standardized tests, at least as currently designed, not only fail to address these crucial capacities, they drive the experience of schooling toward narrower and narrower activities, which render the experience of learning, at best, decontextualized and instrumental.

At the same time, we are not, on principle, opposed to assessment. In fact, we are convinced that it is possible to assess children, classrooms, and schools in ways that are constructive, equitable, and rigorous, and that also advance the overarching goal of human flourishing. We believe strongly that schools should hold themselves accountable to the children and families they serve. We also

children episodically against a pre-determined set of standards—as measured, say, on a given day in March—drives practice toward a focus on the measurement rather than the child, on performing rather than learning. When we shift the focus to address what is going with the child—What interests her? What is she ready for? What obstacles is she confronting?—assessment becomes

## Growth and development are continuous and multi-faceted, and so must be the system for assessment.

recognize that Montessori, based on observation, is inherently data-centric. Building on that premise, we assert that the best way to serve all children and families is for schools to cultivate sustainable systems for assessing their impact using a range of data sources. We don't, in other words, accept the premise that the problem with our current educational culture is measurement. On the contrary, we think it's clear that data, measurement, and vigorous attention to how well we are realizing our collective mission should drive all school operations. For such a system to be effective, however, we must pay careful attention to both what we measure and how we do it.

To this end, NCMPS is developing a new framework for assessment in public Montessori schools—and one that we hope might in time extend to all schools. Within this framework, academic achievement is a subset of human flourishing, and should be central, though not exclusive, to every school's goals and approach.

Our framework for assessing human flourishing rests on two principles derived from years of learning lessons in public Montessori schools. First, like human development, assessment must be a system rather than an event. Second, that system requires carefully coordinated tools to operate with both precision and coherence in measuring and reporting on what matters most to human flourishing.

### Assessment as a system

Growth and development are continuous and multi-faceted, and so must be the system for assessment. Testing

a comprehensive system which yields information that supports the overarching goal of realizing human potential.

### Tools for measurement

In our work with schools over the last ten years, we have developed, field-tested, and refined a collection of tools which work together to assess and support the inputs that drive human development, and the outcomes we expect. Many of them are already in use in schools, and they will be collected and shared later this year in an Assessment Playbook. A few examples:

#### Observing Work Engagement

**Forms:** These one-page forms, used in our Coaching work and applicable to general observation, direct the observer's attention to children's passage through various stages of engagement with Montessori materials, and can be used to gather granular data about the functioning of a classroom. Primary, Elementary, and Adolescent versions have been developed.

#### Developmental Environment Rating Scale (DERS):

This widely used tool assesses the inputs in the form of child and adult behaviors, and environmental characteristics, proven to support developmental outcomes such as executive functions, social-emotional flexibility, and linguistic and cultural fluency.

**Staff Appraisal Instruments:** These rubrics are used to assess assistants, teachers, and leaders according to behaviors which support development, such as observation, invitation, and follow-through. The measures are aligned with the elements in the DERS and the Essential Elements Rubric.



**Essential Elements Rubric:** This school-wide assessment tool helps programs assess their progress towards creating a learning environment that supports development in all its aspects, from the drop-off line to the classroom.

### What about the tests?

When it comes to required standardized tests such as PARCC, STAR, MAP, and others, we recognize that a school's continued existence may stand or fall on test scores. Here we know we must be simultaneously playing both the short and long game. In the short run, it's essential to prepare students for these measures. This means maintaining pedagogical integrity while fulfilling compliance expectations. Fully implementing Montessori, supporting executive function development, and balancing freedom within limits will help children develop the skills and knowledge they need. If additional support in specific targeted areas is needed, it can be implemented within the Montessori framework. But trading away the Montessori for drudgery and drill can never support human flourishing.

Changing the assessment industry is the long game and playing the short

game doesn't mean accepting the premise of either the form or content of existing measurements. When we let children's joy and curiosity guide us and we follow their success with cohesive and comprehensive accountability tools that reflect and support their development, we will be leading a movement. With well-articulated systems for capturing both the flourishing of our students and the environments that support it, we can change the conversation.

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# Montessori went down to Georgia

## Collaborating for policy change



BY ANNIE FRAZER

Dr. Mia Ford, principal at Huntley Hills Montessori and Elementary School in DeKalb County, Georgia, had a problem. She was always looking for Montessori teachers, but when she found them, she couldn't hire them. "Every hiring season, I've had at least three or four applicants with Montessori training interested in a job, but because they didn't hold a Georgia certificate, I was unable to hire them," she says. "Now I'll be able to hire them for our Montessori classes!" Thanks to Georgia's new Montessori teaching certificate, Dr. Ford and other Georgia principals can now hire trained and experienced Montessori teachers to fill openings in public Montessori schools.

Georgia's new teaching certificate was adopted by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) in May 2018 after a sixteen-month collaboration with Montessori Partnerships for Georgia, a nonprofit working to expand access to Montessori in Georgia through a network of public and slid-

As the executive director of Montessori Partnerships for Georgia, I was closely involved with the push for certification, which had been a goal of our organization since our founding in 2014. Here are some things we learned along the way:

### 1. Build on similar accomplishments in other states

Citing the example of other states got us in the door and made space for our very first conversation with the GaPSC about Montessori teacher certification.

In our initial email reaching out to the GaPSC, we mentioned that South Carolina, Connecticut and Wisconsin had already established processes by which trained Montessori teachers could receive state recognition. The response: "Since you suggested that several other states recognize Montessori certification, it may be of interest to us too."

As we moved forward in the process of developing the certificate and getting it adopted, the example of other states continued to be useful. In designing our certificate, the staff of the GaPSC reviewed policy language from several other states. And in their presentation to the 18 commissioners who took the ultimate vote to adopt the policy, the staff shared a map of the six other states that by then recognized Montessori credentials for state certification.

right over my head, and feeling very thankful that she was there. By the end of that meeting, we had made the decision to set up a Montessori Certification Task Force and design a new certificate for Georgia.

As we began to outline the certificate rule, a key to our success was MACTE's willingness to issue letters of equivalency for certificate-seekers who had earned Montessori credentials before their training centers were accredited. Here in Georgia, where an AMI teacher training center with almost 50 years of graduates has just recently become MACTE accredited, the letter of equivalency will make it possible for many excellent Montessori teachers to serve in the public schools.



## Montessori Partnerships for Georgia

Finally, as the Commissioners were preparing for the vote, information from MACTE about their accreditation requirements helped the Commissioners understand and value the depth of preparation that Montessori teachers undergo.

### 3. Show Montessori in action

To turn curious bystanders into Montessori allies and advocates, let them see Montessori children and teachers at work.

After our very first meeting, we invited the staff of the GaPSC who would be working on the Montessori certificate to attend our Montessori Tour and Conversation—an introduction to Montessori essentials, fifteen minutes observing at each level from toddler to adolescence, and a chance for reflection.

After watching toddlers wash dishes and put them away; primary children work with sandpaper letters; elementary children turn cardboard boxes inside out to make huge geometric solids; and adolescents engage deeply in math seminar, the GaPSC staff was excited about Montessori and eager to learn more. "Let's write a rule that works for Montessori" became their rallying cry.

### 4. Pull together a diverse group

To define the outlines of the new certificate, the GaPSC created a task force that included leadership from several state agencies, higher education, and the

Montessori community. We were able to recommend representatives from MACTE and from AMI, AMS, and PAMS training centers, as well as a public Montessori principal and teacher. With skilled facilitation from the GaPSC, the task force held two full-day meetings to outline the rule. Having voices from diverse organizations represented made our final outcome stronger and more credible.

### 5. Call on your network to comment

Every voice makes a difference, and even a few people speaking in support of a new idea can bolster it significantly.

During the public comment period, we reached out to our network to invite

comments in favor of the certificate. This had a big impact. Right after the new certificate was adopted, the Executive Secretary of the GaPSC stopped me to say, "We've never received so many positive comments for any rule as we did for the Montessori certificate. We heard from people as far away as California and Washington, D.C.!"

How many comments were part of this massive outpouring of public support, I wondered? Exactly 18.

### Next steps

The new Montessori certificate went into effect July 1, 2018. So far four certificates have been issued, with ten more in process. At least three teachers have been hired under the new rule to teach in public Montessori classes. By 2021, every teacher in a public Montessori class will be required to hold a Montessori certificate at the appropriate level.

The new certificate opens up a much larger hiring pool for our state's public Montessori schools and lowers a significant barrier to districts opening new Montessori programs. I hope it will set the stage for a flowering of public Montessori across the state of Georgia and will inspire other states to enact similar rules.

*Annie Frazer is the founder and Executive Director of Montessori Partnerships for Georgia, a nonprofit that expands access to Montessori through a network of public and community-based Montessori schools.*

## Representing voices from diverse organizations made our final outcome stronger and more credible.

ing-scale Montessori schools. Holders of the new certificate qualify to teach in a public Montessori classroom at the age level that corresponds to their training. The certificate is open to any educator who meets the following criteria:

- Holds a Montessori credential (or letter of equivalency) at the appropriate age level from a MACTE-accredited training center
- Has a bachelor's degree in any subject
- Passes the GACE (Georgia's equivalent to the Praxis) for the appropriate age level
- Passes the Georgia Educator Ethics Test
- Completes a 3-credit-hour course on exceptional children

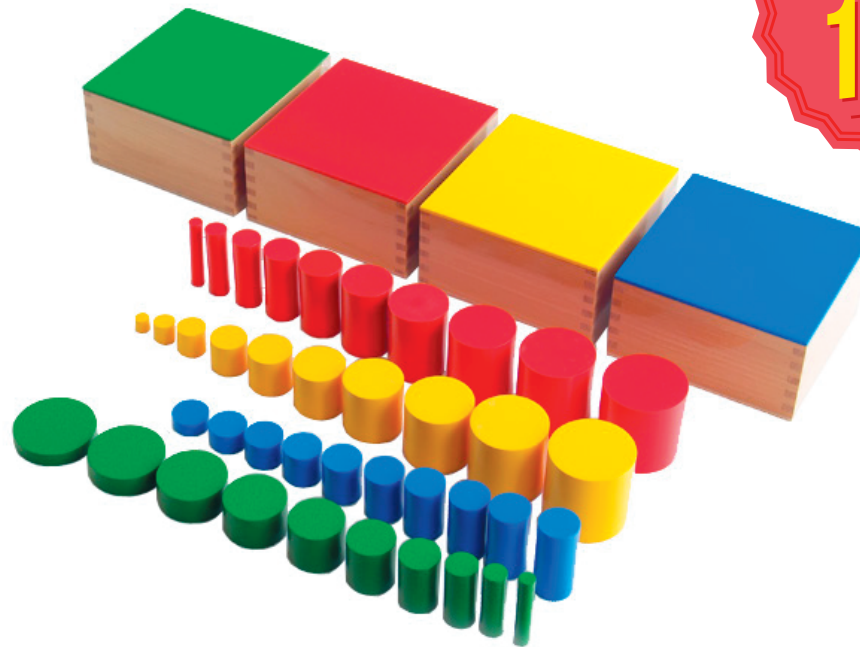
### 2. Involve MACTE

The involvement of Rebecca Pelton, president of the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), made a big difference in our ability to move state certification forward in Georgia.

Rebecca came down to Atlanta to join our first meeting with the GaPSC, and her ability to speak the language of mainstream teacher preparation and program accreditation helped establish credibility and a sense of being on the same team. I remember sitting silently at the table, watching Rebecca and the GaPSC staff juggle acronyms that flew



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# Starting a Montessori advocacy organization

**35 states have active organizations and work—here's how to join in**



BY **DENISE MONNIER**

The Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI, online at [montessoriadvocacy.org](http://montessoriadvocacy.org)) is proud to support 35 state advocacy organizations. We're excited about the work state advocates have done to encourage state policy changes. The movement towards credential recognition for Montessori teacher training continues to gain steam, with legislation proposed in two more states, and Montessori advocates continue to make inroads with child care licensing and QRIS regulations. In addition, MPPI has grown its set of tools to support advocacy and is increasing capacity to provide coaching for state advocates. Our goal is advocacy organizations in 50 states working toward a policy landscape in which high-fidelity Montessori education can expand and thrive.

A unified advocacy agenda is essential to ensuring ecumenical policy change. Many states have longstanding Montessori organizations that have historically engaged in policy and advocacy work, or have successfully taken on that challenge in recent years with the support of MPPI. If your state does not have an organization, or you have one but have not been engaged in advocacy, there are some steps you can take to get started.

It is essential to reach out to the Montessori schools in your state and identify stakeholders and the policy issues that they are facing. A quick survey can be a great way to make that connection, and you can create a short one free on SurveyMonkey, or with Google Forms. The Montessori Census ([montessoricensus.org](http://montessoricensus.org)) is a great place to start to create a contact list for your state, and national Montessori organizations have lists of schools by state as well. A video conference or face to face gathering can help you to get to know each other and discuss your options more deeply.

There are many issues to consider when starting a state advocacy organization. For example:

- Applying for non-profit status

- The need for an elected board, by-laws, articles of incorporation, etc.
- Group focus: limiting yourselves to advocacy, or serving members in other ways, such as networking or professional development

There are enough options to make just deciding where and how to start a difficult project.

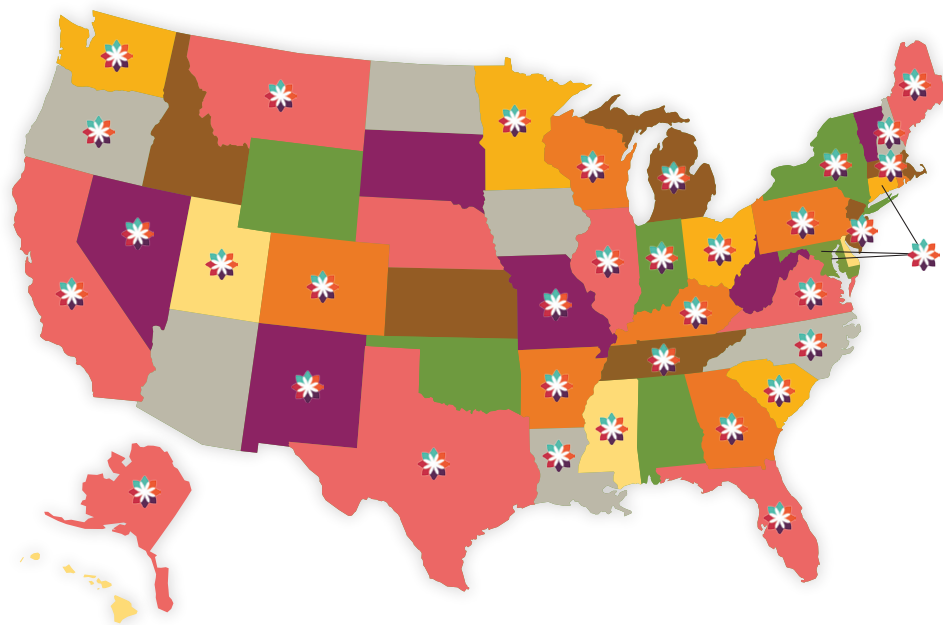
One way to work through these questions is to engage your major stakeholders in a Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) analysis, which can inform organizational mission and strategy, and help with direction and decision making. Depending on where you are in the process, and the Montessori presence in your state, this may involve just a few people or a larger group. It's important to be as inclusive as possible, seeking input from private, public, and charter schools across training affiliations, and from programs serving the breadth of age ranges from infant/toddler to adolescent.

Strengths and weaknesses come from within your organization or community, and opportunities and threats are typically external. Here we will look at advocacy initiative needs and capabilities, but this system can be used for anything you are considering.

For a budding organization, strengths could be the number of Montessori schools in your state, the longevity of those schools, the level of experience of the administrators, your founders' enthusiasm and commitment to advocacy, relationships that have been established with state officials, or Montessori public school presence in your state.

Weaknesses could include a small Montessori community in your state, a lack of interested volunteers, no established relationships with state policy makers, absence of long-term administrators in your community, or a dearth of Montessori public school options in your state.

From the external perspective, opportunities could be the recent presence of Montessori in the news, enhanced support from MPPI, attention on early childhood education in the public and in state and federal government, or funding opportunities available because of that attention. If you have no Montessori organization in your state, you have the opportunity to set one up, with many experienced states to look to for support. Challenging state policies for Montessori schools could be an opportunity for



*Advocacy organizations are making their way to middle America*

organizing, driving more volunteers to your group.

External threats could include negative perception of, or even ignorance about Montessori in your state, bad history with state policy makers, or no history of a "Montessori voice" in your state. State policies that constrain Montessori schools could also be a threat, as they may limit the number of schools to join in the effort or diminish the commitment to full Montessori implementation in existing schools because it is too difficult.

Items can fall into more than one category in this process. Choosing the best category, or recognizing the way that one item fits into more than one, can refine your priorities going forward. If you already have an established organization, you may see items in these categories to consider.

To pull some items out of this list that might inform the mission and strategy of your group, let's look at an example. If your strengths include some long-standing schools with experienced and knowledgeable administrators, and your weaknesses consist of a small Montessori community and a low number of volunteers, you can establish a mission and strategy that is achievable within those parameters. Having long time Montessorians and well-established schools could give birth to an agenda around providing strong education about Montessori for your state policy makers, which could include tours of schools you know are excellent examples of what you are sharing with policy makers. If your volunteer capacity is low, then tackling just one specific

policy issue to start makes sense. You could also focus on one specific state agency to appeal to for policy change. If your child care licensing regulations are restrictive, you could set your goals there. Your organization's mission and strategy could be focused on using the strength of their Montessori knowledge and history to provide education to the state's child care licensing body as leverage to make requests for exceptions or exemptions for Montessori programs.

Whether your new organization is large and well-supported or small and volunteer driven, you can engage in effective advocacy by carefully examining your options and establishing goals and processes that are viable in your particular situation. By prioritizing and planning realistically, small groups with little support can be highly effective, and large or well-supported groups can make the best use of the resources they have. No matter where you choose to dive in, it's important that you get started; advocacy work is long-term, so your organization can grow as it progresses.

MPPI offers support and coaching for Montessori state advocacy organizations wherever they are in their development and advocacy work, as well as the opportunity to connect with other state groups in similar stages of growth or who may have experience with challenges you are facing. Contact us at [Denise@montessoriadvocacy.org](mailto:Denise@montessoriadvocacy.org) or [Kandyce@montessoriadvocacy.org](mailto:Kandyce@montessoriadvocacy.org).

*Denise Monnier is the Director of State Advocacy for the Montessori Public Policy Initiative.*



# The Montessori opportunity

The early learning world is starting to take notice



BY IHEOMA IRUKA

*This analysis originally appeared at [The74Million.org](http://The74Million.org), a nonprofit education news site focused on K-12 classrooms, under the title *How 3 States Are Closing the Opportunity Gap by Bringing High-Quality Personalized Learning Programs Into Free Public Schools**

All children need a very personalized approach to develop into well-rounded individuals ready for success in school and life. Unfortunately, all children don't have equal access to this ideal education, and those who don't are quickly left behind in the American competition for upward mobility.

We don't have to live with this social Darwinism, especially when states like Connecticut, South Carolina, and Massachusetts show that we can bring these highly effective learning programs into free public schools and achieve great results.

Many know Montessori as a preferred educational approach among families who can afford to send their children to expensive private schools.

Despite having lower academic measures at the start of preschool, by the end, she found, low-income children who attended Montessori were statistically equal to their peers from higher-income households who attended Montessori and other schools. In contrast, children from low-income households who attended traditional preschools evidenced a consistent and persistent gap in achievement compared with peers from higher-income families.

Greater academic achievement in Montessori didn't come at the expense of developing integrated skills that are essential for better life outcomes. In Lillard's study, Montessori children liked school more than children in other programs. They were more persistent in dealing with difficult tasks and had better social understanding and higher executive functioning that improved their ability to engage in goal-directed behaviors. These are skills that are relevant for school and life success.

A study of South Carolina Montessori programs evidenced similar results. Low-income Montessori students showed more growth in English language arts, math, and social studies than low-income peers outside the program, and Montessori students in general showed higher creativity, executive function, and school attendance, and fewer behavioral issues, than their non-Montessori peers.

Montessori is by no means the only early learning approach that works.

guidance on how to build collaborative environments, evaluation mechanisms, and continuous quality improvement.

There are important lessons here. High-quality early learning programs can be brought to scale in very diverse public settings to produce the outcomes we want to see in all children. We can be more successful by focusing on developing the whole child, not just academic skills. And, what's ideal for low-income children is what's ideal for all children: understanding them as people and giving them self-agency, the freedom to learn at their own pace, and the guidance to become lifelong learners and doers.

*Iheoma U. Iruka, Ph.D., is the Chief Research Innovation Officer and Director of The Center for Early Education Research and Evaluation at HighScope Educational Research Foundation, and partners with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector as a Senior Research Associate.*



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## What people don't know is that Montessori was originally developed to elevate the lives of low-income children

What they don't know is that Montessori was originally developed to elevate the lives of low-income children—and that it is being embraced in the public sector. For example, public schools in Hartford, Connecticut offer Montessori preschool magnet programs to children from all socioeconomic backgrounds. Angeline Lillard of the University of Virginia studied Hartford's public Montessori programs and found that they leveled the playing field for children from low-income families.

Teachers and staff at Boston Public Schools created Focus on Early Learning, a model that combines the best elements of child-centric, highly developmental, brain-building early childhood education programs. It now operates in the majority of the district's elementary schools, and the result is citywide improvement in language, literacy, math, executive functioning, and emotional development. Best of all, Boston is making Focus on Early Learning available to all public schools—complete with an infrastructure, high-quality materials, and

# The Montessori Census speaks

## Turning data into information

BY NCMPS STAFF

The Montessori Census is picking up speed and starting to put out some very interesting data—but we need every public Montessori school to join in. (If your school hasn't claimed and updated, get in touch with us at [info@montessoricensus.org](mailto:info@montessoricensus.org) and we'll get you set up.)

How many public Montessori schools are there? We've had an answer for a while now: the number "about 500" has bounced up and down a little but stayed about the same since we started seriously counting seven years ago. But how good is that number? And what do those schools look like? There's so much more we're just starting to find out.

NCMPS created the Census in 2012, with support from the Trust for Learning and the cooperation of all the national Montessori organizations. Last year, we launched a major refresh and relaunch, to clean up the data we had on file from years back, and to really get into the details. How many children? How many classrooms? True three-to-six or "kindergarten" only? Choice, lottery, magnet, neighborhood, or something else? This is the kind of data that supports research and advocacy, as well as raising the visibility of individual schools and the movement as a whole. Last year, Dr. Angeline Lillard used the Census to recruit schools with a specific profile for the first-ever federally funded study of Montessori, which is underway now.

We ask schools to manage their own profiles, so we can have the most up-to-date, firsthand information, and they have responded—since April, we've gone from 176 public schools claiming their profiles to over 200. Private schools, which add to our picture of the Montessori model, have joined in as well, going from 612 to 790. And we've weeded out schools that were closed or wrongly listed, so the actual growth is more than those numbers suggest.

Of those 200 claimed public schools, about 100 have taken the extra step of filling in the very latest fields, where we drill down into grade levels and class sizes, and we're ready to share some preliminary data. It's preliminary because this is just the 100 schools most invested

in responding, so no doubt there's some selection bias there, but it starts to suggest the outlines of the true shape. Below, we'll take a look at what the numbers would be if the other 400 schools are like these.

The first thing is the number of children: about 35,000. Bear in mind that these are "early returns"; as more schools report in we can expect that number to go up. Still, we know some interesting things about even this small sample.

About 1/3 of these children are in Primary, or three-to-six programs. Another third are in six-to-nine, or 1st through 3rd grade. Then another quarter are in

charts at right.

How does that compare with the rest of the education world? As it happens, EdWeek recently posted a data mine of U.S. Education statistics which are essential for getting a sense of scale.

There are about 90,000 public schools in the US, so if we have about 500, that comes to about 0.5%. (You can correct for 3-6 and middle/high school, but it stays about the same.) Doubling the number of Montessori schools in five years would take us to ...10%. It puts things in perspective. Our share of children is even smaller: 150,000 out of 57 million, or 0.26%.

## How many children? How many classrooms? True three-to-six or "kindergarten" only? Lottery, magnet, neighborhood, or something else?

nine-to-twelve, and the remaining tenth in middle or high school. So when we think of children in public Montessori (at least for these schools), about a third are in kindergarten or lower, while more than half are in grade school. Another way to look at it is this: two-thirds of the children are nine or younger, which helps explain the focus on reading and math scores. Along with everything else that happens in Montessori for young children, they are acquiring essential basic literacy and numeracy, and Montessori needs to fully implement its remarkable strengths in these areas.

What about those three-to-six-year-olds? With the scarcity of funding for three- and four-year-olds, one might expect that "kindergarten only" Primaries might dominate, but (at least for this sample) that wasn't so. Nearly 80% of children six and under are in "PK3-K" classrooms, as reported by these Census users. (The sample skews more heavily to charter schools than the whole set—55% versus 40%—which may play a role in this surprising data.)

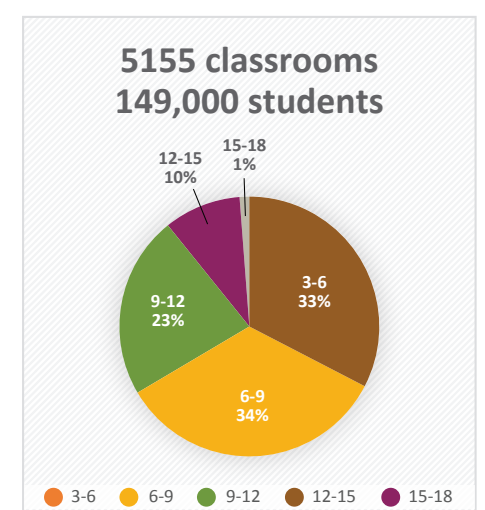
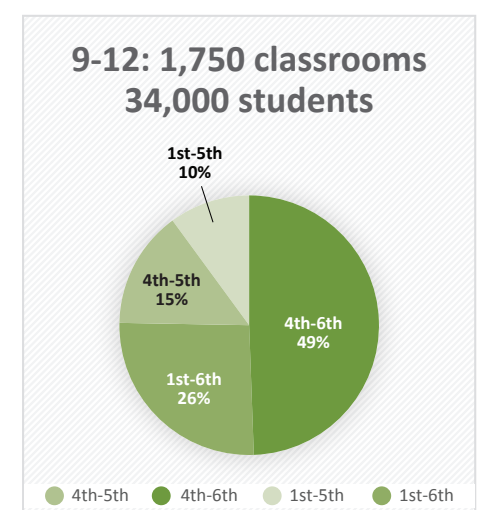
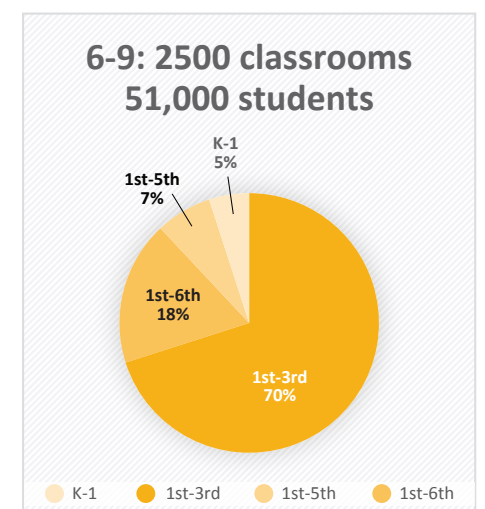
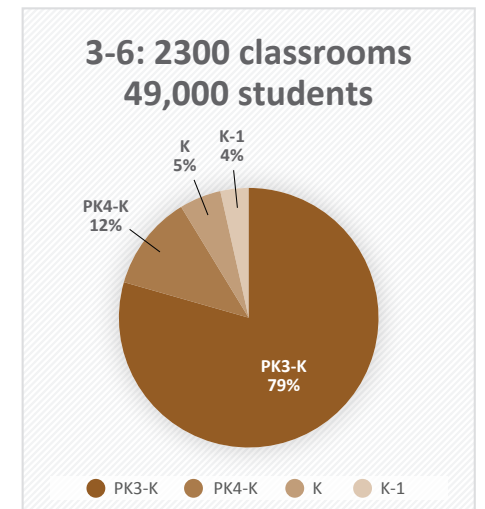
### The Big Picture

What about the other 400 schools? We have some limited data, and we can make a rough extrapolation. If the other schools were like the first 100 (which we already know they're not, as stated above), the numbers would look like the

All that might be a little dispiriting. How will we ever achieve the growth we need in order to reach all the children who need us?

But we look at it a little differently. "Aller anfang ist schwer" is a German proverb typically translated as "Everything is difficult in the beginning." And at the beginning is where we are, and the task before us is monumental. But *schwer* can also be read as "heavy", "weighty", "serious", or "important", and this resonates with Montessori's important work with young children. Our work supporting healthy development in young people is so important for their lifelong trajectory—that's why we insist so strongly on including the "three" in "three to six". Or including the family in "birth to three," if we can get there. When we work with the youngest children, we work at the maximum point of leverage, which is where you need to be if your strength is small and you want the greatest reach.

Another proverb, attributed by the internet to Confucius but most likely drawn from the work of another Chinese figure, Guan Zhong, reminds us: plan for 1 year, plant —ten years, plant trees—100 years, teach children. We're on the 100 year plan.





# Montessori Public Policy Initiative

**What is the MPPI, and where did it come from?**



BY **WENDY SHENK-EVANS**

The Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI) was born out of a shifting education policy landscape that created dissonance between fully-implemented Montessori and newly created regulations and rubrics. In the late 90s and early 00s, more and more states were revising child-care regulations, implementing Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) and taking other measures both to improve early childhood education and to capture federal dollars connected with education initiatives.

While the goal of bringing high quality education to all children is one that Montessorians share with the broader education community, unfortunately, Montessori educators were not at the table as policy makers worked to both articulate and regulate quality in the hopes of improving early childhood offerings in their states. The result was a policy landscape in which several essential components of high-fidelity Montessori, such as higher adult-child ratios and three-year mixed age groupings, were often constrained. In this new landscape, Montessori programs increasingly faced threats both to high-fidelity Montessori implementation, and, in some cases, to their very existence as they faced a host of policy issues. Schools were forced out of compliance with Montessori accreditation standards as they had to make programmatic changes to meet child-care licensing requirements. In some states, schools received low ratings in

their state QRIS system, which both indicated to the public that they were low quality programs and prevented them from participating in child-care subsidy programs.

It was in this context of existential threats that MPPI emerged. Teachers and administrators began tackling advocacy work and reaching out to their national associations for assistance

## Advocacy work isn't ultimately about any one school; this is about children and advancing an educational model

At the same time, Montessori was expanding dramatically in the public sector, highlighting the need for recognition of the Montessori teaching credential, crosswalks to state standards, program evaluation tools that align with the Montessori model, and increased education of charter boards and school districts regarding how fully implemented Montessori classrooms operate.

dealing with new policy obstacles. In response, AMS and AMI/USA had begun to work on public policy issues independently, but soon recognized the need to work jointly if progress was to be made; policy makers who were being approached independently by Montessori educators gave us a clear message

*continues on page 14 >*



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# Shenk-Evans: Montessori Public Policy Initiative

*continued from page 13*

that the Montessori community needed to come together, clarify their requests, and speak with a unified voice. In the Spring of 2012, AMI/USA and AMS created pilot Montessori advocacy coalitions in six states. By 2013, MPPI was underway as a platform for coordination of efforts in a historic collaboration between AMI/USA and AMS. 20 states had advocacy groups comprised primarily of individuals who did not have a background in public policy but who were motivated by an urgent need to protect the fidelity of their programs and the existence of their schools.

Since then, Montessorians throughout the United States and across multiple affiliations have been working together to modify policies that were enacted without our input, and our efforts have had several victories. We have successfully amended child-care regulations, educated licensing specialists and QRIS raters about what to expect in a Montessori classroom, devised strategies that

though most Montessori advocacy work is done within each individual state, the states talk to one another, so building a body of consistent policy from state to state is so important. Using the Montessori Essentials as the foundation for policy work from state to state ensures that when Chief State School Officers, Superintendents, or early childhood policy makers are at conferences or consulting one another and comparing notes, they have all heard the same message from the Montessori community.

Since its inception, MPPI and our state advocacy groups have largely been operating from a reactive state. Teachers and administrators were mobilized to action when confronted with policies that forced them to compromise the Montessori environment and, in some cases, made it impossible to meet program accreditation standards. But advocacy work isn't ultimately about any one school; this work is about children and advancing an educational model that not only meets each individual child's needs but also unleashes their potential.

## We recognized that speaking with one voice is critical to the advancement of Montessori education in the US

afford high-fidelity programs certain exemptions, and gotten the Montessori teaching credential recognized in several states.

The coordinated efforts of Montessorians both nationally and within states has been key to the many accomplishments our state advocacy groups have landed. We recognized early on that speaking with one voice and articulating what unites us is critical to policy work and the advancement of Montessori education in the United States. With slight variations in trainings and accreditation standards, it was imperative that the collective Montessori community have, and communicate, a shared definition of Montessori in public discourse, research, and advocacy efforts. The development of the Montessori Essentials in 2015 was a critical step in providing Montessori educators across the country a unified means through which to articulate what Montessori is. United advocacy efforts are not only pertinent within a state, but across states. Even

We want as many children as possible to have access to the rich array of benefits an authentic Montessori education provides. That means we need to shift from reactive state to proactive.

Author and activist Naomi Klein asserts that "it's that interplay between a vision of the world we want instead, and a horror in the face of what our current

### What is public policy?

- Public policy encompasses laws, regulations, courses of action, and funding priorities created by a government entity or its representatives.
- Public policy is created at the federal, state, and local level, and seeks to address a problem or issue, sometimes proactively, and other times reactively.
- It is "public" policy because it is made on behalf of the public, but the policies regulate and impact both the public and private sector

system is producing that both catalyzes people into movement and keeps them in the movement." There is still much work to be done amending policies and regulations that impede Montessori implementation and educating policy makers. But as we continue to dig into transforming the policy landscape, we must also articulate our "vision of the world we want" and consider how we can inform the future landscape. We are establishing a seat at the table in state and national education conversations, so we have the opportunity not simply to protect our programs but to inform and reform the broader educational landscape. We as Montessorians have a profound understanding of the environment as teacher, of how confidence, concentration, independence, and self-regulation undergird all aspects of development, and of the life-long impact of a child-centered education. Our public policy successes ultimately mean

### How can I be an advocate?

Advocacy work takes everyone's involvement and is ongoing. Here are a few ways to get started:

- Get involved in your state advocacy group. Find your group here: [montessoriadvocacy.org/state-groups-](http://montessoriadvocacy.org/state-groups-). MPPI can help you start one if your state does not yet have a group.
- Invite licensing specialists, charter board members, state legislators and other policy makers to your school so they can see Montessori in action and be advocates on the inside.
- Get involved with child-care and education advocates beyond Montessori. Many states have NAEYC affiliates and other groups advocating on behalf of children. Your involvement ensures that the Montessori voice will be incorporated into their advocacy efforts.
- Learn more from MPPI at upcoming conferences. MPPI will run advocacy workshops and have information tables at the AMI/USA Refresher Course in New Orleans, the MEPI Conference in SC, and the AMS Conference in DC.

that more children have access to these gifts of a Montessori education.

*Wendy Shenk-Evans is the Executive Director of the Montessori Public Policy Initiative.*



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# Bradley: Freedom and discipline

*continued from page 1*

those boys...if I didn't, the world would."

As I reflect on this as a parent I can't help but feel the irony of her intent. In order to ensure her boys' freedom in society she felt she had to beat them to dis-

around his own neighborhood wearing a hoodie. Black men like Philando Castile must carefully choose their words and measure their movements when talking with police during routine traffic stops. Daily freedoms that white children are afforded can get a Black child shot and

## "I had to beat those boys... if I didn't the world would."

cipline them. She beat them because she loved them. This is a sentiment shared by many southern Blacks. For traditional southern Blacks too much freedom is dangerous. In the eyes of many African-Americans, an undisciplined Black youth will end up like Emmett Till or Trayvon Martin. Implicit bias and institutionalized racism create an unsafe world for Black boys and girls in America. Black boys like 12-year-old Tamir Rice do not have the freedom to play with toy guns. 17-year-old Trayvon Martin did not have the freedom to walk

killed. Black parents try to protect their children by taking away freedoms and administering discipline.

Unfortunately, the consequences of consistent corporal punishment may be a contributing factor to a number of the ills that plague Black society. Studies show that children who are consistently spanked have increased anti-social behavior, aggression, mental health problems, and cognitive difficulties. In my own urban public Montessori classroom I see the downfalls of corporal punishment. For example, during the

beginning of the school year children accidentally drop and break materials. Through grace and courtesy they learn that mistakes happen and it's OK when something accidentally breaks. However, it takes time to build a culture where the child knows that mistakes are always forgiven. Often at the start of the year when something breaks the children are terrified. Sometimes they cry, afraid of what, "the teacher is going to do to them." I've also seen children raise their hands in defense when I or my assistant come to clean up the glass—a practiced motion to guard against a swift blow. Upon observation those same children are shy, and reluctant to play with others. On the other hand, I have had children who are overly aggressive. They hit, shove, and push their peers at the slightest provocation. Those children carry around anger like a shield.

Thankfully, Maria Montessori created an effective method that assists children in becoming intrinsically disciplined. If more African-American parents adopt Montessori principles in their lives we can eliminate harsh extrinsic disciplinary methods. We all want to proactively teach our children self-control, and self-discipline, especially because racism often paints a jaundiced picture of our kids. Maria Montessori provided a way to teach our kids to be disciplined without repeating the mistakes of our parents. We don't have to

and courtesy lessons to help them navigate through any social situation, freeing them to express themselves wherever they are in society. Children are given opportunities to practice resolving conflicts through role play. They are given words and a safe space to show others who they are or tell them how they feel without the fear of judgement.

The Montessori method reverses the concept of freedom and discipline that has been ingrained in us as a people generation after generation and gives us the blueprint for a way out. I've heard many African-Americans say that Montessori is not for "our kids"—that our kids need harsh parameters to behave. But those harsh parameters are failing our kids on every level. A 2017 report by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights showed that African American children represented 18 percent of public preschool enrollment, but 48 percent of preschoolers receiving multiple out-of-school suspensions. The practice of suspending preschool aged children has been identified as the first step in the school to prison pipeline. The statistics worsen as children progress through school. If we want to create change for future generations then we have to change our practices right now. We can learn from our mistakes. We can create a different path. We can follow a method that has been tried and tested for over 100 years. A method that

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## Freedom and discipline are loaded words in the African-American household

beat our children before the world does if we give them the tools to effectively navigate through it.

One element of Montessori that supports self-discipline is the prepared environment. A Montessori environment is filled with beautiful delicate materials that call to the child. However, if he lacks self-control he might break the work, a natural consequence of disorder. In a Montessori classroom the child is shown how to handle materials carefully. Then, if an accident happens, they are empowered to clean things up. Children can learn self-discipline and self-control without fear of harsh reprisals.

Another element is lessons in social interactions. Children are given grace

encourages freedom of thought, inner discipline, love of all living things, and above all else respect. As Pythagoras said: No person is free who is not master of himself. Through the Montessori method we can finally free our children to reach new heights instead of fettering them to the fears and insecurities of our fathers.

*Dawn Bradley is a founding Primary Teacher at Libertas School of Memphis, Memphis' first public Montessori school. She holds AMS 3-6 training from LUMIR, a residency program piloted at Libertas, and holds a B.A in Curriculum and Leadership from University of Memphis.*



# Monnier: Policy makers

continued from page 1

has led efforts to provide economic opportunities, and is committed to ensuring equitable educational opportunities for all Marylanders.

Both Jor'dan and Smith have had personal and professional experiences with Montessori.

Senator Smith experienced Montessori education as a child and has worked to support the growth and stability of programs in his community: "Having received a Montessori education at the Barrie School, in Silver Spring, I have firsthand knowledge of the benefits a Montessori education can have."

We asked a few questions about the Illinois and Maryland Montessori communities, and the advocacy work and partnerships from our policy makers' points of view.

**JJ:** My godmother provided my earliest introduction to Montessori education. She was among the first African-American women to open a Montessori program on the south side of Chicago. I have also read noted African American scholars' publications that support the Montessori approach for African-American children. I include Montessori education in my History and Philosophy of Early Childhood Education course at Chicago State University. Sharon Damore of the American Montessori Society (AMS) invited me to join the AMS Research Committee, where I served for five years. We developed the research program and research poster sessions, and in addition, a research journal was established. I have also presented at the AMS conference. I have also had the opportunity to collaborate on an article about manipulatives and Montessori education and have written about teacher preparation and Montessori education.

**MP:** How strong is the Montessori movement within your state? Does your state Quality Rating and Improvement System aggregate data for Montessori programs?

**JJ:** There are over 200 Montessori programs in the state of Illinois. When developing Illinois' Quality Rating and Improvement System we were intentional about including Montessori participation within our system. Within Illinois' QRIS Montessori data is not tracked independently. As you are aware, this

could be a problematic undertaking because Montessori is not protected by copyright or patent. We need assurances that programs are in fact Montessori. We are working, in coordination with the Association of Illinois Montessori Schools (AIMS) on how to recognize Montessori credentials that have been received from programs accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education within our QRIS.

**WS:** Every year in Maryland, over 4,000 students receive high-quality education at more than 30 Montessori institutions throughout our state. Montessori programs are valuable because they teach students to think independently and creatively. As in Illinois, Maryland's QRIS recognizes the quality of Montessori accreditation, but data is not tracked independently.

**MP:** Does your state's Montessori community reach out to partner with state organizations/agencies or other education groups?

**JJ:** There has been an increase in visibility, engagement and representation by the Montessori community, represented by AIMS, in policy discussions and development. We're starting to experience the Montessori "voice" in Illinois. I've watched this change evolve and appreciate their contributions and hope to see more members of the Montessori community become a part of the larger community. They are needed in order to change the narrative and perception of Montessori education.

**WS:** The official advocate for Montessori programs in our state is Montessori Schools of Maryland (MSM), an organization I worked with during the 2018 legislative session. Senate Bill 1041, a bill I sponsored, would have expanded opportunities for Montessori teachers so that teachers wishing to work in a public Montessori school would have been able to do so by completing accredited Montessori preparation programs. While significant, this is just one example of how public policy advocacy can be used to improve upon the quality of Montessori schools in Maryland.

**MP:** What do you think is the single most important strategy that the Montessori community can implement to support advocacy work?



Sen. William C. Smith and Dr. Jamilah R. Jor'dan

**JJ:** Building and strengthening relationships is one strategy the Montessori community can adopt to support advocacy work. The Montessori approach is often not understood or misunderstood by individuals. Relationship-building provides opportunities to increase awareness and understanding of the Montessori approach and how it aligns in a larger context. This will become increasingly important for the Montessori community due to the increasing growth of Montessori education in the public schools across the country.

**WS:** In Maryland, advocacy groups are becoming increasingly effective at advocating for the success of the Montessori method. I would encourage advocates and those passionate about Montessori education to visit and engage with the Maryland General Assembly or their County Council. Montessori students, caregivers, and teachers are the best advocate for the Montessori method.

**MP:** Can you name some things you wish were different about the Montessori community and why? Or provide feedback on how Montessori can more effectively manifest the social justice aspect of Dr. Montessori's work?

**JJ:** I've been an advocate for Montessori education for over 30 years. I have watched the Montessori community struggle up close and at a distance. The differences between American Montessori Society and Association Montessori Internationale have been a challenge, but it is my understanding the issues are resolved, which is a great hurdle passed. The challenges Montessori education has faced with research, because anyone can call themselves a Montessori program/school resulting in lack of fidelity to the approach, have also been a barrier. I have been transparent and

have expressed my concern about the disconnect from the social justice focus established by Dr. Montessori. My observation is not offered as criticism but an area that needs to be strengthened. There is still a perception that Montessori programs are for affluent children and families. Across the country, the Montessori approach is growing in public schools. Specifically, to provide access and support for children of color. There is a focus on equity and inclusion and the Montessori community should be engaged in the dialogue. As stated earlier, we have a responsibility to change the narrative about Montessori education.

**WS:** I am a proud graduate of the Barrie School, which pushed me to pursue social justice and advocacy as a lifelong profession. I look forward to working with Montessori advocates in Maryland to help in the future, as the Montessori community increases focus on this fundamental aspect of the philosophy.

Jor'dan and Smith are policy makers who have been touched personally by Montessori. We know there are many more supporters out there who can see the power of Montessori education for as many children as possible, and we look forward to partnerships with them.

*Denise Monnier is the Director of Advocacy for MPPI. Jamilah R. Jor'dan, PhD, is Deputy Director of the Illinois Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development and faculty on leave with Chicago State University. Maryland State Senator William C. Smith was appointed to represent District 20 in the Maryland State Senate in 2016, making him the first African-American Senator from Montgomery County.*

# Ayer: Montessori inspired?

*continued from page 3*

to teach math, and many elements just don't work out of context. But modern research suggests that children anywhere are better off in mixed-age groups, with choice and agency, in a beautiful prepared environment working with adults who understand and respect development. It may be Montessori heresy, but it doesn't matter quite so much what color the materials are or what name is over the door.

When I think about Montessori-inspired, I try to think back to what inspired me about Montessori in the first place—where did I first “breathe it in.” Of course I inhaled it deeply during my training, but that's not an experience most people get to have. When I really consider it, the real inspiration came before that, the way it did for many of us—in a classroom observation.

What was it about that classroom visit? The tiny chairs and tables, to be

sure. The beauty, harmony, and simplicity of the environment, caught my eye, no doubt; the baskets and trays enticed, and the mysterious charm of the materials captivated. But of course what really took my breath away was the children. A room full of young children—who we've

Montessori Northwest in Portland, Oregon in 1994). That's where the inspiration deepened and grew. There, I was able to see past the furniture and the aprons, to discover that Montessori was based on decades of scientific observations of children, and to learn how those

## The real inspiration came before that, the way it did for many of us—in a classroom observation.

been conditioned to expect as loud, unregulated, and rambunctious—moving about the room with quiet purpose, intense concentration, and even exuberant joy. Like so many of us at our first exposure, I thought, “There's something going on here—I want to know more.”

For me, learning more meant taking a Montessori training course (at

observations led Maria Montessori to develop a comprehensive, deeply integrated model founded on a profound respect for children and human development. Montessori herself was ultimately inspired by the children, of course—she famously said,

*“It is not true that I invented what is called the Montessori Method. I*

*have studied the child, I have taken what the child has given me and expressed it, and that is what is called the Montessori Method.”*

Now, most people won't even see a Montessori classroom, in name only or otherwise, let alone take a training course. They will encounter Montessori at the periphery, at the level of trays and colored beads, and we need to meet them there without judgment and help them further into what's truly inspiring. For Jeff Bezos, and for the schools that are drawn to the peaceful, engaged children, and the seemingly effortless learning that takes place, let's welcome them in, and help them see past the sandpaper letters and golden beads (as miraculous as those materials are) and look to the children—the true source of inspiration.

*David Ayer is the Communications Director for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.*

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# Puerto Rico recognizes Montessori

**Public Montessori in Puerto Rico takes a bold step**



BY DAVID AYER

Puerto Rico is home to the greatest concentration of public Montessori schools in the United States.

Yes, you read every word of that sentence correctly. As previously reported in MontessoriPublic, Puerto Rico packs 45 public Montessori schools into an island the size and population of Connecticut and an economy on par with Alabama. And yes, Puerto Rico is part of the United States.

Since Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017, the Puerto Rican education system, and Montessori's special place there, has been in turmoil and disarray, along with many basic civic structures on the island.

Restructuring Puerto Rico's public education system in the wake of Maria is the special purview of Secretary of Education Julie Keleher, a Philadelphia native with a background in project management for a Delaware school district, the U.S. Department of Education,

needed to cut through the tangle of inefficiencies and patronage holding the system back, while to others she is a heartless technocrat ruthlessly cutting costs and closing schools without any understanding of local conditions and the effects on people's lives. And many suspect an ulterior motive of privatizing the island's educational system.

Hurricane Maria's impact in September 2017 presented both a challenge and an opportunity for school reform. Hundreds of schools were damaged or destroyed (along with countless homes and businesses), roads were washed out, and of course the entire island was without power for weeks. Comparisons to the "charterization" of the New Orleans school system after Katrina were inevitable, and Keleher herself called the aftermath "an opportunity to press the reset button."

Perhaps the most controversial move has been school closures. Keleher had closed 167 schools before Maria, and last summer the department announced the closure of another 265 (down from 305 initially), bringing the island's total down to 847, a 25% cut. Puerto Rico's student population has been declining for years, and Keleher cites the inefficiency of small schools in remote areas serving fewer than 50 children, as well as daunting repair costs, but it's easy to see the impact on families and communities

**"The Montessori teacher is very structured, so the classroom can dance the way it should dance."**

and private clients. She was appointed to the Puerto Rico position in 2016 by the current Governor, Ricardo Rosselló, with a mandate to re-organize, streamline, and improve the island's heavily bureaucratic and poorly performing education system.

Keleher was a polarizing figure from the outset. Some saw her mainland background as a strength, allowing her to sidestep partisan conflicts and entrenched interests that have paralyzed previous reform efforts, while others viewed her as a "white savior" figure brought in from Washington and reinforcing decades of colonial influence. For some, her administrative and project management chops are just what is

when a core institution is shuttered.

So where does this leave Montessori? In December, I spoke again with Ana Maria Garcia, Executive Director of the Instituto Nueva Escuela (INE), a non-profit which trains teachers and supports public Montessori in Puerto Rico. Garcia has been, and continues to be, the driving force behind public Montessori here for decades.

Garcia doesn't disagree that the system is overly centralized and in need of reform, and applauds Keleher's move to bring decisions closer to the schools and the people who work there. But she is wary of the strict dollars-and-cents approach and the sense that reform decisions need to be made quickly, by the



*Rosibel Recondo connects with public Montessori students in Puerto Rico*

department, with little public input.

Although fifteen Montessori schools were at first slated for closure, in the end, after protests and collective action, they all remained open. According to Garcia, this is due to the deep community participation which characterizes the Montessori community and INE itself. Parents, teachers, and supporters mobilized a campaign to advocate for the successful programs. Keleher proposed transforming the popular Montessori schools into charters, but the idea was strongly rejected by the community. (This stands in contrast to public Montessori state-side, where 40% of such schools are organized as charters, for the autonomy and independence the model affords.)

The big story, however, is the permanent establishment of a Secretariat of Montessori Education and the appointment of a new leader there. In 2014, thanks to the work of INE, the Secretariat (a department) was established within the Department of Education by an executive order of the Governor, and the role of Secretary of Montessori Education was created and filled. This structure took the Montessori programs out from under the academic oversight department and allowed them the autonomy to implement Montessori curriculum and school structures (mixed ages, trained teachers, etc.).

In the fall of 2018, the position opened up as the former Secretary stepped down and Keleher moved to make a new appointment. There was initially a good deal distrust in the selection process,

and the Montessori community mobilized once again to advocate for their position. After what Garcia said was "thousands of phone calls" from the community, a more consultative, participatory process was launched, and in the end Governor Rosselló appointed a trusted member of the community: Rosibel Recondo.

Ms. Recondo was (until this appointment) a Puerto Rican public Montessori school principal who started out as a conventional K-6 teacher. Her experiences in the classroom and later as a principal shed some light on the education system Keleher and other are working to reform. "In a regular classroom, the teachers have to control the students." At times, classrooms were dominated by children "fighting, shouting, and not working." This isn't surprising in a system serving children traumatized by oppression, poverty, and violence in their communities, and one using more traditional, authoritarian educational methods.

Starting as a principal in 2006, Recondo knew she had to address the dysfunction in her classrooms and began to look at schools with more successful approaches. In the early 2000s, Garcia's work developing Montessori schools had begun to take off, and Recondo found her way the flagship program, Ponce de Leon in the barrio Juan Domingo, and had her "Montessori moment": "The classroom was organized, the teacher

*continues on page 20 >*



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## Ayer: Puerto Rico

*continued from page 20*

peaceful, not shouting or controlling, the students working quietly, with a lot of discipline, on things that were important to them." She knew she had to make a change.

She returned to her school and arranged to have her teachers trained, joining an AMS administrator's training in New York herself. Just as in Juan Domingo, she saw her school and her community transformed. One of the greatest changes, she said, has been the "mesa a la paz," or peace table, where children can resolve problems without an adult. She has seen her teachers step back from control and grant independence to their students. "The Montessori teacher is very structured, so the classroom can dance the way it should dance."

What's next for Montessori in Puerto Rico? Even more important than filling the Secretariat position with a community leader is the fact that the department, formerly established by executive order, has been enshrined in legislation,

and so cannot easily be undone by the next Governor (Rosselló's term is up in 2021). Rosselló has also promised INE that the Montessori schools are safe from characterization. Garcia would like to see the department expanded to include administrators for each age group (birth to three, three to six, etc.) and Recondo will be focusing on the working conditions and salaries of the adults—teachers in Puerto Rico make close to the median household income in a country with a poverty rate of 45% and a surprisingly high cost of living. The ultimate resolution of the territory's \$74 billion debt crisis, which looms over the \$3-4 billion budget for the entire education system, will be an enormous political and economic transformation well beyond Rosselló's, Garcia's, or Keleher's control. But you can be sure that the public Montessori community will continue to make its voice heard.

*David Ayer is the Communications Director for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.*



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# MSJ comes to Portland

## Portland will host the Montessori for Social Justice conference in June

BY MONTESSORI FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE STAFF

The 6th annual Montessori for Social Justice Conference will be held in Portland, Oregon, at Harmony Montessori School from Thursday, June 20, to Sunday, June 23, 2019. This is the first time the conference has been held in the Pacific Northwest or even on the West Coast. Previous conferences have been held in St. Louis, Salt Lake City, Cambridge, Houston, and St. Paul.

Montessori for Social Justice (MSJ) was founded to support the creation of sustainable learning environments that dismantle systems of oppression, cultivate partnerships to liberate the human potential, and amplify the voices of the Global Majority. People of the Global Majority (PoGM) is a term used to identify people who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. People of the Global Majority make up 80% of the world's population.

The theme of the 2019 conference is Decolonizing the Human Potential. The conference will open up discussions on how to disrupt and dismantle structural systems of oppression that can manifest in teachers' beliefs. It will offer information on how to develop a safe classroom environment that is anti-biased and anti-racist, where learners are engaged in quality learning. The MSJ conference will also continue to offer a session on de-centering whiteness for attendees.

"This conference will provide a safe space for attendees, especially attendees identified as people of the Global Majority, to lift up their voices and speak their truths as educators, parents and social justice advocates. This conference is also a wonderful platform that offers a space for educators from all walks of life to come together to share ideas on how to bring Montessori to all. This includes all socioeconomic backgrounds, all who are of the LGBTQIA community, all

abilities (cognitive and physical), all religions, all ethnicities, all races, and all cultures to work together to serve and prepare our future—the children" said conference organizer Keinya Kohlbecker, who is currently a teacher at Harmony Montessori and attended the MSJ conferences in 2017 and 2018.

Kohlbecker adds, "After living in

## This conference offers a space for educators from all walks of life to work together to serve and prepare our future—the children

Portland for 16 years, I felt like I was alone as a Black woman in my profession. At times, it was a challenge for me to express the educational inequities in Portland's Montessori community, and how this form of education was not made readily available to all families.

As a result of this, I began to prepare my spiritual purpose as a teacher, and sought to "unlearn" and dismantle the knowledge I previously had of how systems of oppression can appear in our national education system, as well as how that can find its way into the learning environment.

As an educator, my goal is to spread the message to our local community that we can do better in making Montessori accessible for all families. The Montessori for Social Justice conference can be that conduit of information and resources to liberate our minds of implicit bias as educators."

Organizers encourage educators, particularly in Montessori, parents, social justice advocates as well as all educators and administrators to attend and share ideas on how education can be more accessible to all learners, with a focus on the importance of Montessori education in the public sector. The nonprofit also welcomes the financial and volunteer support of the Portland community. Donations to MSJ help offset costs for teachers to attend the conference.

Montessori for Social Justice has been organizing the annual gathering since 2014 when a small group of Montessori teachers and supporters convened at City Garden Montessori Public Charter School in St. Louis, MO. The conference attendance continues to increase every year. In June 2018, a record number of 320 Montessori educators attended the

four-day conference at St. Catherine's University, in St. Paul, MN.

For more information on how you can help sponsor the conference or to join the MSJ community, visit [montessoriforsocialjustice.org](http://montessoriforsocialjustice.org) or contact [montessoriforsocialjustice@gmail.com](mailto:montessoriforsocialjustice@gmail.com).



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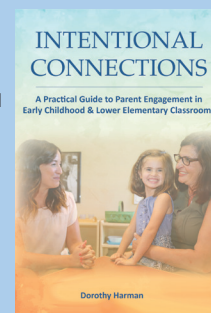
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# Montessori inclusion training in Milwaukee

**A European inclusion model with a Montessori history comes to the U.S.**



BY DAVID AYER

A prominent, decades-old European Montessori inclusion model, little-known in the English-speaking world, is coming to the U.S. this summer, to be presented in English for the first time. The Hellbrügge Foundation's work springs from a historic collaboration with the Montessori family and early Montessori teacher trainers, and the Foundation's work supporting children with special needs is well-established in Germany.

Dr. Theodor Hellbrügge (1919–2014)

was a highly influential German pediatrician and researcher who specialized in a medically supported inclusive approach to children with disabilities. Hellbrügge became interested in the Montessori approach in the 1960s and founded Aktion Sonnenschein ("The Sunshine Project") in 1968 as an inclusive "Montessori kindergarten" for children with special needs. The organization is now a foundation operating a network of schools and supporting inclusive education for children through age eighteen.

Hellbrügge worked with Maria Montessori's son and collaborator Mario Montessori in the 1970s, and they co-authored *The Montessori Pedagogy and the Disabled Child* in 1977. In 1976, an AMI Special Education course was launched at Aktion Sonnenschein under the direction of AMI trainer and Montessori associate Margarete Aurin, and the course continued until 1996. (Aurin

trained with Maria Montessori in Barcelona in 1933 and was Mario Montessori's course assistant on the first AMI course in Frankfurt in 1954.)

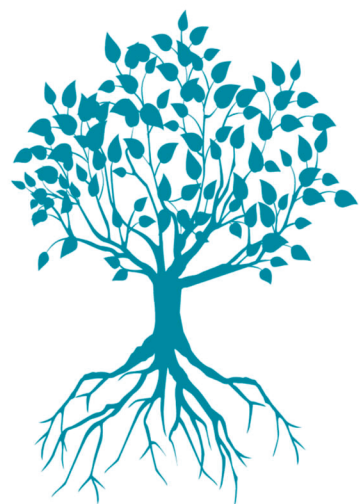
In 1996, AMI, under the direction of Montessori's granddaughter Renilde Montessor, wanted to divide the course into a Primary diploma course and a Special Education endorsement, but Hellbrügge resisted the separation, so AMI and the foundation went their separate ways. In 1991 Hellbrügge established the Theodor Hellbrügge Foundation, which supports education, training, and research in special education, as well as the promotion and construction of centers for special needs children throughout Germany. The Foundation continues to offer (non-AMI) Montessori inclusion teacher training at the Primary and Elementary levels and will launch its 60th course this year.

English-speaking Montessorians have visited and studied at the Foundation and the Aktion Sonnenschein's schools over the years, and Foundation professor Joachim Dattke presented at a NAMTA Conference in Phoenix in 2014, but Hellbrügge's work has not been widely available in the U.S.

However, this summer a new Montessori organization, Montessori Medical Partnerships for Inclusion (MMPI, online at [Montessori4Inclusion.org](http://Montessori4Inclusion.org)), working with the Penfield Children's Center and Penfield Montessori Academy, will bring the Foundation's Montessori Inclusion Training to Milwaukee, Wisconsin for the first of several two-week programs. According to MMPI, "Incorporating inter-disciplinary medicine, state-of-the-art developmental habilitation and social pediatrics, the Montessori Inclusion model offers a holistic and well-rounded approach to aiding a child's development and optimizing social inclusion in Montessori schools."

The course is open to Montessori trained teachers, administrators, coaches, consultants, and trainers from all Montessori organizations. Information and registration are available at [Montessori4Inclusion.org](http://Montessori4Inclusion.org)

*David Ayer is the Communications Director for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.*



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# We need your voice!

## Write an article for MontessoriPublic

MontessoriPublic shares the stories of the public Montessori world, but we can't do it without you. Here's how you can contribute.

**What should I write about?** The next issue will focus on the intersection of public Montessori and equity. This has rightly been an issue of growing concern in the our community over the last several years, and we anticipate some powerful conversations.

**Research? Opinion?** Well-reasoned, clearly stated positions are interesting even if they're controversial. Say something strong and from the heart, backed up with a few strong statistics.

**Experienced writers only?** No! First-time writers and published authors alike have appeared in these pages.

**How long should it be?** 900-1,000 words is great: Enough room to say something worth saying, but not so long that readers lose interest. Plus, it fits nicely on the page, with room for an image or an ad. You can get a feel for

pieces of that length from the ones in this issue.

**What's the deadline?** The final deadline for the Spring issue is **April 2nd**, which gives us a little time for editing and communication with writers. Submitting even earlier is fine! That gives us even more time to get your work just right.

**What about pictures and a short biography?** Every article looks better with a nice, high resolution photo helping to tell the story. We also need a high resolution "head shot" for the author images. "High resolution" usually means a file size of 1MB+. Add a short (50 words or fewer) biography and we're all set.

**Will I get paid?** Unfortunately, no. On our limited budget, we can't pay writers at this time. Ad revenue covers some costs, and our fundraising is directed as much as possible to supporting public Montessori programs. We can only thank you for adding your work and your voice to that support.

Send your submissions to David Ayer: [editor@montessoripublic.org](mailto:editor@montessoripublic.org)

# The public calendar

February 15–18

**AMI/USA Refresher Course**  
NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

February 22–23

**Association of Illinois Montessori Schools Conference**  
MONTESSORI: FOUNDATIONS  
TRANSFORMING FUTURES  
LISLE, ILLINOIS

March 1–3

**MEPI Hands for Peace Conference**  
SOUTH CAROLINA

March 20–21

**NCMPS Public Montessori Symposium**  
WASHINGTON, DC

March 21–24

**AMS Annual Conference**  
THE MONTESSORI EVENT  
WASHINGTON, DC

April 4–7

**AMI Affiliates Conference**  
MONTESSORI GUIDANCE FOR ADAPTING TO THE  
GLOBAL DIGITAL CULTURE  
TACOMA, WASHINGTON

June 17–28

**Foundations of Montessori Inclusion**  
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

June 20–23

**Montessori for Social Justice Conference**  
DECOLONISING HUMAN POTENTIAL  
PORTLAND, OREGON

October 25–26

**Public Montessori Educators of Texas Conference**  
ADVANCING EQUITY IN PUBLIC MONTESSORI  
AUSTIN, TEXAS

If you'd like your Montessori event featured here, send it to us!

Deadline for the next issue: **April 2, 2019**.  
Be sure to include the date, organization, event title, city and state  
**Email to:** [editor@montessoripublic.org](mailto:editor@montessoripublic.org)

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