

The DC teacher residency

A pilot program to support emerging teachers from diverse backgrounds



BY **KATIE BROWN**

In 1988, the predecessor to this publication, *Public School Montessorian*, published its inaugural issue. The headline on the front page of this very first issue reads, “The Teacher Shortage: Problem Persists, but Districts Respond with a Variety of Approaches.” Thirty years later, the teacher pipeline continues to be one of the most pressing issues facing public Montessori schools.

Finding trained candidates to fill lead teacher positions is a much-discussed challenge. Several articles in this issue of *MontessoriPublic* take on aspects of this challenge and highlight common issues. In many places, these folks need to have both Montessori training and a state teaching certification to be qualified. Furthermore, the Montessori teaching force, like the general teacher population in the U.S., is predominately white and female, making it difficult for schools to recruit teachers who reflect the diverse communities they often serve.

Compounding this supply problem is the issue of churn. The reality of teaching in high-need public school settings can be a rude awakening to new teachers who may have developed an idealized notion of the Montessori classroom in their training. For many schools, finding qualified teacher candidates is only the beginning; what ensues is often a struggle to support and retain these teachers as they come to terms with the demands of doing

Montessori in the public sector. While Montessori teacher training is an exquisite model of instilling high-quality pedagogy, it is often insufficient for success in high-need public schools. The Montessori movement in the U.S. has historically been dominated by independent schools; even today, it is estimated that public schools comprise only about 10% of the total number of Montessori schools nationwide. In this context, it is not surprising that many Montessori training programs are oriented toward service in independent schools, where issues like special education, serving English language learners, and serving students exposed to trauma may be less pronounced. As a result, public Montessori schools face turnover among teachers who are not adequately prepared for service in the public sector.

who are being groomed for training and lead teacher positions, to be enrolled as residents. Although the pool of trained Montessori teachers is, indeed, predominately white, classroom assistants are more likely than lead teachers to be people of color and to be pulled from the surrounding community. By encouraging schools to look to their classroom assistants as a way to “build their bench,” and explicitly incentivizing schools to nominate people of color as residents, we hope to help schools create faculty that are more representative of the District, which is majority-minority.

As a cohort, these residents participate in a series of hybrid courses on neurodevelopment, serving diverse learners, and language and literacy. These three course strands, known collectively as the Surround, are deliv-

Public classrooms can be a rude awakening to new teachers with an idealized notion of the Montessori classroom

Last year, the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector piloted a model of school-based professional formation for public Montessori teachers in Washington, DC. This program, the DC Montessori Teacher Residency (DCMTR), aims to provide novice and aspiring public Montessori teachers with the skills and dispositions they need to be successful in the public sector, while also diversifying the teacher pipeline. Participating schools nominate lead teachers who are fresh out of training, as well as classroom assistants

ered as two-week modules focusing on topics like family engagement, self-regulation, and race and equity. While we believe that educators in both public and private settings can benefit from support and professional development in these areas, we know that this skill set is essential for Montessorians to effectively serve all children in the public sector. Residents participate in online discussions around shared readings, videos, and podcasts. They apply their

continues >

learning to their work in their classrooms via job-embedded tasks like observations, case studies, and student action plans. In an exciting new partnership with Whitworth University, these courses will be available for graduate-level credit in 2018-2019. Though teachers in DC charter schools are not required to have a state teaching license, the hope is that eventually, these courses can provide a path to state certification for Montessori teachers.

One substantial difference between the DCMTR and traditional teacher residencies is that the unit of service for the DCMTR is the school rather than the individual resident. At the same time that residents are supported through the Surround, the whole school is supported in developing a culture of continuous improvement and professional growth. This component, dubbed Culture, entails monthly schoolwide professional development, collaboration and coaching with an NCMPS Montessori coach, and support for implementing protocols like Lesson Study and Child Study. At the same time that residents are developing the skills and dispositions that will help them meet the varying needs of the children in their classrooms, the



Bringing order and structure to a complex set of puzzle pieces

through the entire school community.

Currently in its second year, the DCMTR has designed Surround and Culture to wrap around the Montessori training experience; however, the program has not actually included Montessori training. That is set to change in 2018-2019. In January of this year, NCMPS was awarded a Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) grant from the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education. The SOAR program is designed to increase the quality of DC charter

Montessori; traditional teacher preparation programs are also grappling with how to prepare teacher candidates for the demands of service in high-need public schools, and urban schools generally face high levels of teacher turnover. We hope, however, that the DCMTR will provide a model for a solution that is.

Katie Brown is the DC Regional Coordinator for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

Look to classroom assistants as a way to “build your bench,” and nominate people of color as residents to create more representative faculty

whole faculty is elevating their practice through ongoing professional development, continuing refinement of lesson presentations (Lesson Study), and collaborative intervention and progress monitoring for children experiencing challenges (Child Study). In this way, the effects of the DCMTR ripple

schools by providing funds for teacher preparation for these schools. Thanks to these grant funds, residents from DC Montessori charter schools will be able to access Montessori training at a substantially reduced cost as part of the 2018-2019 DCMTR.

These issues are not unique to

MontessoriPublic

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

NATIONAL CENTER for
MONTESSORI in the
PUBLIC SECTOR

Subscribe at montessoripublic.org

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

Copyright 2018 National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector