

# Advancing equity in public Montessori

## Collaborating to extend Montessori's reach

BY **THE ADVANCING EQUITY IN PUBLIC MONTESSORI COLLABORATIVE**

We face a lot of challenges in public Montessori. Institutional racism skews the playing field for children along racial, cultural, and socio-economic lines. Many of our children endure Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on a regular basis. It's challenging when children graduate from our program and watch as different doors of opportunity open for some and close for others. It's challenging to take energy away from our children and focus it on the administration of certain assessments that aren't always useful to our practice. It's challenging to feel like there's never enough time to properly care for ourselves, our environments, or our children.

And yet there is also an amazing amount of possibility and promise in public Montessori. Our children are incredibly resilient, brilliant, joyful, kind, curious, and engaged. They are learning how to develop deep pride in themselves as unique individuals and how to navigate across lines of difference. When children learn to be advocates for themselves and for others, they can build a more just and peaceful world for all of us. Public Montessori gives us hope for a better future.

To continue to help public Montessori reach its fullest potential, a group of us embarked on a journey together this year called Advancing Equity in Public Montessori. We are trying to unlock how to fully implement Montessori in a way that ensures equitable outcomes for all children.

In partnership with the nonprofit

organization Transcend, Montessori For All convened this group of public Montessorians with the hope that deeper, intentional collaboration would help us more urgently find solutions that help Montessori reach its fullest potential. Participants in our Advancing Equity in Public Montessori include Montessori guides and administrators from Magnolia Montessori For All in Austin, Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School in DC, City Garden Montessori School in St. Louis, The Montessori School of Englewood in Chicago, and Stonebrook Montessori in Cleveland, as well as trainers and staff from Capitol Region Education Council—The Montessori Training Center Northeast and the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.

We began our collaboration by grounding ourselves in the state of equity and inequity in public Montessori schools, and we shared strategies that each of us are developing and using to advance equity in our respective settings.

We leveraged Design Thinking—which is a way of thinking and work-



*Jacqui Miller prototypes a tool*

better understand the strengths, needs, hopes, and desires of the children and families in our communities. We then combined insights gathered from our interviews and observations and realized there were tremendous similarities among our schools. Next, we heard updates about learning science from national experts. Dr. Nicole Ev-

## There is a focus on equity and inclusion and the Montessori community should be engaged in the dialogue.

ing that uses a collection of hands-on methods to help people tackle big problems—to imagine, develop, test, and iterate on new resources and strategies to advance equity in our settings.

The process began by conducting empathy interviews and observations at our respective schools to

ans, Principal at City Garden, helped us explore what it means to look at our work through an anti-bias, anti-racist lens based on the deep and profound work that has been going on at City Garden Montessori School for more

*continues >*

than a decade. We surfaced trends and generated key insights for what children need most. From these insights we crafted questions to give direction to our problem-solving, such as:

- How might we ensure that all children in the elementary classroom are engaging in Great Work while

identity affirmation groups, and a primary assessment/observation system that aligns grade-level outcomes with observations of children using Montessori materials.

It has been incredibly energizing to work collaboratively with public Montessorians to tackle our common chal-

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mastering standards?

- How might we ensure children receive the intervention and support they need to meet grade-level outcomes?
- How might we better ensure children new to Montessori in kindergarten receive the support they need to meet grade level expectations and be prepared for Lower Elementary?
- How might we more explicitly teach social-emotional skills through the Montessori curriculum rather than layering on separate programs?
- How might we intentionally support the develop of our children's cultural identities?
- How might we support guides to ensure all children are on track to meet grade level expectations?

Through in-person convenings and follow-up video conference conversations, we developed, tested, and iterated on several new resources, including lesson planning and intellectual prep guidance, a sample schedule and planning guidance to help ensure all children are receiving enough intervention, a toolkit clarifying different types of follow up work, a truncated scope and sequence for kindergarteners new to Montessori, ideas about how to embed social-emotional learning in our history albums, a process for building

challenges. Jacqui Miller, founder and Principal at Stonebrook, expressed that she was honored to participate in this work and how satisfying it felt to be part of a democratic process with people who are truly dedicated to the success of children of color in our public Montessori environments.

Our major takeaway from our work together is that many of us in public Montessori programs need more resources, tools, training, and ongoing coaching in order for us to operationalize Montessori and implement it in a way that leads to equitable outcomes for all children.

Another key takeaway is that as we work to create these tools and resources, we will go farther, faster if we work in collaboration. We all face similar challenges, and yet we each bring unique perspectives and ideas to contribute to the solution. We are eager to continue our Advancing Equity in Public Montessori work next year and develop strategies and solutions to additional challenges, such as:

- The need to reduce academic disparities along socio-economic lines in math in Upper Elementary
- The need to ensure that all children graduate from Lower Elementary reading on grade level
- The need to ensure all kindergarteners enter first grade on track in

reading

If you are interested in accessing the free, open-source resources that are created by the Advancing Equity in Public Montessori Collaborative, you can visit <http://montessoriforall.org>. If you are interested in joining Advancing Equity in Public Montessori for the 2019-20 school year, you can email [hello@montessoriforall.org](mailto:hello@montessoriforall.org).

Dr. Nicole Evans and Sara Cotner will be presenting their work on Identity Affirmation Groups at the Montessori For Social Justice conference in Portland this June. Additionally, Montessori For All is hosting the next Public Montessori Educators of Texas conference in Austin on October 25 and 26, 2019, which will focus on Advancing Equity in Public Montessori. More information can be found at [pmetconference.org](http://pmetconference.org).

It truly takes a village. There are amazing things happening in our schools that we can learn from each other!

*The Advancing Equity in Public Montessori Collaborative is a diverse group of Montessorians and other educators and activists collaborating to further their shared mission.*

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