

Equity developments in Montessori

A long-delayed conversation has spread through the Montessori world



BY **DAVID AYER**

The past six months have brought this country's deeply embedded structural racism and inequity to the top of our national conversation, even in competition with a global pandemic and a growing political crisis. The racial equity conversation has permeated the Montessori world as well, and there have been a wide range of equity and anti-bias, anti-racism statements and messages from schools, training programs, and Montessori organizations, as well as some substantive actions and developments.

AMI/USA

At the February Association Montessori International USA (AMI/USA) Refresher Course, a group of Montessorians of color experienced a racist incident and shared their experience, which sparked a response from AMI/USA and intense discussion on social media and in online forums. Since that time, AMI/USA has announced a number of steps, including:

- Formation of a Human Rights and Social Justice Committee to advise the AMI/USA Board
- Solicitation for a Human Rights and Social Justice Adviser
- A four-part Social Justice Webinar Series, free to attend, with suggested donations going to the Black Montessori Education Fund

IMC

In June, the Inter-national Montessori

Council (IMC) and the Montessori Foundation began hosting a weekly, virtual Montessori Town Hall on the topic of "Standing Together—Our Role in Ending Systematic and Internal Racism," and these meetings have continued through September.

AMI/EAA

This summer, the AMI Elementary Alumni Association (AMI-EAA) contracted with NCMPs to provide a six-week online Culturally Responsive Montessori Environments course to its membership in lieu of its annual conference.

BMEF

In July, the Black Montessori Education Fund (BMEF) was launched "with a mission to increase engagement and support positive experiences of Black children and adults in Montessori education," according to co-founder Dr. Ayize Sabater. The fund has a goal of raising \$1 million to support scholarships for teacher training and children's school attendance, and for school start-ups. On August 31st, Montessorians all over the world celebrated Maria Montessori's 150th birthday with a virtual Montessori Everywhere event, which raised more than \$20,000 for the fund.

As of October, 2020, the BMEF has awarded nine grants totalling more than \$30,000.

AMS

In August, the American Montessori Society (AMS) was awarded a major two-year grant from the Wend Collective to support Montessori diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and announced a search for Senior Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and a Director of Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist Education. AMS also hosted *Black Lives*

Matter, a Virtual Montessori Rally, with presentations from Black Montessorians across organizations, attended by 8,000 viewers.

NCMPs

As we stated in our February letter in response to the Refresher Course events, "NCMPs joins in the acknowledgement of the role of unconscious bias, systemic racism and white supremacy in our lives, our work and our society. We stand with all who work to constructively interrogate and improve our community's practices. We commit to ongoing examination of structural racism, in our community and within our own organization."

NCMPs has undertaken ongoing whole-staff, professionally-led Race and Equity readings, conversations, and explorations, and has contracted with Embracing Equity for a four-month board and staff Anti-Bias, Anti-Racist training and workshop.

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

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