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Behavior support informed by Peace Literacy

A new approach to PBIS focuses on peace

BY **SHARYN CLOUGH, PAUL K. CHAPPELL, JACQUI MILLER,** AND **NATALIE CELESTE**

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is a systemic, evidence-based approach to addressing classroom behavior teachers find challenging. While PBIS gets implemented in a variety of ways, most approaches share two main conceptual improvements over more traditional responses to challenging behavior:

- PBIS focuses on rewarding positive behaviors, rather than (or in addition to) simply punishing challenging behaviors.
- PBIS recognizes that classrooms and schools are systems with a variety of stakeholders who interact to produce challenging behaviors, and who need to collectively take responsibility for building supports that reduce those behaviors.

Teachers, administrators, and support staff all have roles to play, and they all need to be on the same page. When these conceptual changes are implemented consistently, with buy-in from all the relevant stakeholders, PBIS has been associated with a reduction in challenging behaviors, and in the kinds of punishments that traditionally accompany them. These results have encouraged many departments of education across the US to require the implementation of PBIS.

However, PBIS approaches, for all their documented successes, have a number of similarly well-documented weaknesses. For public schools aligned with Montessori, the weaknesses are especially salient. Here, we offer a brief account of some problems with PBIS generally, and from a Montessori perspective in particular. We also outline foundational principles of a modified behavioral support model that has similar well-documented positive outcomes, while avoiding the weaknesses. The model is based on the insights provided by:

Constructive engagement is its own reward

- Paul K. Chappell's Peace Literacy paradigm for trauma-informed education
- Ross Greene's Collaborative and Proactive Solutions model
- Zaretta Hammond's work on Culturally Responsive Teaching
- the Nautilus Approach designed by Public Montessori in Action

Just as Montessori's insights into

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Montessori: More culturally responsive

A new study compares Montessori to "no excuses"

BY **DAVID AYER**

A new study comparing Montessori and the "no excuses" model finds that Montessori is (or can be) a culturally responsive pedagogy, and that the approach "avoids the concerns raised by no excuses schools while delivering positive outcomes."

The study, from Angeline Lillard and researchers at the University of Virginia (*An Alternative to "No Excuses": Considering Montessori as Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*, in press with the *Journal of Negro Education*), compares the "no excuses" model to Montessori on outcomes and cultural responsiveness.

"No excuses" schools, of which KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) is perhaps the best-known example, emerged over the last two decades as an effort to address the so-called "achievement gap" between Black and white children on standardized tests, taking as a guiding principle that there is "no excuse" for schools and adults to allow unequal achievement. They're known for rigid behavior requirements, tight discipline, punishments and rewards, and heavy reliance on testing. Many of these schools have been successful in raising graduation and college enrollment rates, but have also been criticized for being unresponsive to cultural differences and, at their worst, contributing to the "school-to-prison pipeline."

Montessori, on the other hand, takes almost the opposite approach, emphasizing self-motivated behavior, internal discipline, intrinsic rewards, and lower reliance on high-stakes tests. Yet some public Montessori schools have been shown to produce high levels of achievement and a reduction in so-called "gaps."

This paper focuses in on the culturally responsive aspects of Montessori education, observing that the approach aligns with five established principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP):

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For up-to-the minute news and discussion

Doubling down in Georgia

Georgia is ready, and the time is now

BY **ANNIE FRAZER**

In January, our board of directors set a big goal: to double the number of Georgia school districts offering public Montessori over the next five years. Currently, Montessori is offered in just three districts around the state: Savannah-Chatham County (on the coast), DeKalb County (in metro Atlanta), and Baldwin County (in rural middle Georgia). Doubling that number will change the lives of children statewide and build momentum for further expansion of Montessori in the years to come.

Why us?

Montessori Partnerships for Georgia is a nonprofit founded on the conviction that every child deserves access to an education that is joyful, inspiring, and helps them meet their full potential. Our mission is to expand access to quality, child-centered education through a network of public and community-based Montessori schools. To do this, we work in five impact areas:

1. Engage parents and community leaders to drive demand for Montessori
2. Ensure that state, local and federal policies support fully-implemented Montessori
3. Help school districts (as well as early learning centers serving vulnerable communities) start and strengthen Montessori programs
4. Provide professional learning for teachers and administrators
5. Reduce the cost barrier to Montessori through Practical Lifesavers, our Montessori materials rescue program

For districts that are ready, the opportunity has arrived

As a support organization for publicly funded Montessori programs, we are uniquely positioned to catalyze the doubling of public Montessori in our state.

Why Georgia?

Georgia is ready! Here's why:

- **Teacher certification:** the state now recognizes Montessori teacher training from a MACTE-accredited center as a path to state teacher certification. This was one of our first big policy wins!
- **Flexibility:** In Georgia, any school district can apply to become a charter district, gaining tremendous flexibility in how education is delivered. Even districts that have not gone the charter route can apply for waivers from state regulations. Districts committed to high-fidelity Montessori have the flexibility to implement it.
- **Precedent for mixed-age Children's House:** The pioneering Montessori public schools in our state, the longest-running of which implemented Montessori in 1988, have established a precedent for braiding funding sources (Georgia PreK and K-12) to create mixed-age classes at the Children's House level integrating preK4 and kindergarten. The final step will be to incorporate three-year-olds into the mix by braiding in Head Start funding, state or local childcare funding, sliding scale tuition, or some combination thereof.

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In this issue: the future

What a year this has been—and it's not over yet, although the end is in sight.

In the last issue, we asked our readers to think about what happens next for Montessori. How will we welcome back children and families who may have been out of our buildings all year? What will we keep from this pandemic year, what will we leave behind, what did we learn?

Annie Frazer lays out a bold new plan to double public Montessori in Georgia.

Jaime Frost and **Erin Gutierrez** look back on the year and ahead to the fall at Tobin Montessori in Cambridge.

Emily Hedin reflects on Breakthrough Montessori and what it will carry forward.

Karlie Hurlebaus, **Rachel Kimboko**, **Denise Miles**, and **Betsy Romero** share their vision for the fall at Lee

Mary Maunz reminds us to look to the children.

Other public Montessori stories:

Sharyn Clough, **Paul K. Chappell**, **Jacqui Miller**, and **Natalie Celeste** describe a Peace Literacy adaptation of PBIS.

Kathryn Mosquera and **Camille Smith** tell the story of how a Maryland charter school turned their test scores around.

Rachel Young gives us the history of pubic Montessori in and around Charleston.

We also bring you:

A report on a **new study** comparing Montessori and "no excuses" schools

A **landscape analysis of Montessori ECE** from Child Trends.

A **report on the growth of public Montessori** as reflected in the Montessori Census.


Mosquera and Smith: Maryland Young: South Carolina Child Trends: Access to ECE

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SPRING 2021

VOLUME 5, NUMBER 3

COMING FALL 2021:
EARLY CHILDHOOD

Primary—Casa de Bambini—the Montessori foundation. But how do we pay for it? How do we do it right? How do we provide access for all?

Contributions, observations, and letters, on this or any public Montessori topics, are invited at

editor@montessoripublic.org

Your deadline is **Aug 31, 2021**. More guidelines on page 23.

Lessons learned at Tobin in Cambridge

The pandemic prompted deep literacy lesson study

BY **DAVID AYER** WITH **JAIMIE FROST** AND **ERIN GUTIERREZ**

Tobin Montessori School in Cambridge, MA, is an AMS-accredited district Montessori school serving 311 children from three years old through fifth grade. *MontessoriPublic* visited Tobin in 2016 when it hosted the third annual Montessori for Social Justice Conference—you can read the profile online at MontessoriPublic.org. In April, 2021, we spoke with Principal Jaime Frost and Montessori Specialist Erin Gutierrez about their pandemic adaptations and plans for the fall.

Tobin, like schools across the country, closed in mid-March last year, initially for a two-week period which quickly extended through the end of the year. Schools scrambled to plan and implement distance learning programs, acquire and distribute technology such as laptops and headphones, and worked to meet children's and families' needs for academics, social-emotional health, and basic supports such as meals.

Counting on more freedom of movement coming soon

Tobin re-opened with fully remote learning in September, but by the second week in October, the school was able to operate in-person for four days each week, offering regular school days four days a week, Monday–Tuesday and Thursday-Friday, with Wednesday reserved for remote learning and deep cleaning. About half of school families opted for this model, so the in-person classrooms were able to function somewhat normally, making use of masks and social distancing. The district had promoted a split model, dividing children among separate fully-remote and fully-in-person sections, but Tobin didn't want to disrupt children's lives further by "re-rostering" their classrooms. So teachers gave remote and in-person instruction simultaneously, at times streaming in-person lessons directly to children's homes. In addition to keeping classrooms together as social and academic units, this gave the school flexibility if a child needed to move in or out of remote learning, to quarantine for example.

Teachers used different models at different times. One teacher might bring the laptop to a lesson table or a circle on the floor. Another might present material to the in-person class using a SmartBoard, while physically present students worked with individual materials at their tables and remote students used digital platforms such as SeeSaw or items sent home. The school implemented an ambitious program to get materials in students' hands. Many materials were dropped off and picked up in rotation, some were assembled as paper versions, and families were given beads, pipe cleaners, and instructions to create a home set of bead bars for each child.

By April, many families had opted in to in-person learning, partly because they became more comfortable with the protocols, partly because school doubled as child care, and partly because children wanted to be back together. Tobin features unusually large classrooms for a public Montessori school, so they have been able to make social distancing work even if the classrooms might look different these days. Some children have access to a shelf of their own materials (some the school already had, some purchased, and some constructed from paper and cardstock for the circumstances), and some materials were shared but cycled through a washing station in between uses.

Every child has a touchscreen Chromebook and headset with a microphone, so they can log into specials such as art and music either from home or from the classroom. They've also had in-person outdoor physical education twice a week straight through the winter.

Some schools have reported higher levels of family engagement under remote learning conditions, as caregivers saw what went into creating and adapting Montessori curriculum, and classrooms were beamed into people's living rooms. "I think what I've got from parents is a newfound appreciation for the level of independence and trust that our teachers have for our students", Frost said. "Informally, I've heard, 'We love that kids will get a lesson online, but then have independent work—but with an open meeting link where they can log in if they need help. As against a non-Montessori school where they're on Zoom six hours a day.' We've tried to structure it, especially in lower elementary, the way the classroom works, where they'll get a lesson and go work, with a teacher available as a guide."

I also asked what didn't work so well. There were the technical issues you might expect, and some you might not—for example, the school had HEPA filters running, which created too much noise for the streaming students, so teachers needed voice amplifiers. Getting up to speed on doing remote and in-person teaching at the same time was also "a huge learning curve," Frost said. "Each teacher needed to have autonomy to figure out what worked for them. You can see teachers teaching in different ways—taking the Chromebook to the hallway, sitting in a circle with the laptop in the lesson, using the SmartBoard—there are so many different ways to do this." Gutierrez added, "the rub now is that in some classes there may be only two or three children still at home—we don't want to ignore them, but how do we support them and give them a level of instruction that is basically private tutoring. You're not creating independence by sitting two or three times a day with one child."

> **You're not creating independence by sitting two or three times a day with one child**

At the same time, teachers and children are adapting in new and creative ways, Frost said. "I might see two kids with headphones side by side, it looks like they're talking to each other, and then you realize that they're online with a third child at home, and they're including that child! What we've learned is that, if there's a need in the future for a child to be at home, they can still engage in school."

So what might Tobin carry forward from this experience? Both Frost and Gutierrez called out teacher planning and curriculum knowledge. Without being able to directly observe remote students, teachers needed to really analyze and organize their lessons and the areas they were covering, and uncover any gaps. During the pandemic, the school continued a self-study process around curriculum and planning—a form of Lesson Study, in effect—which entailed a much more detailed grid of lessons, purposes, follow-up work, and scheduling than they might otherwise have done. "This has brought the level of buy-in and content knowledge through the roof," Gutierrez said. "It's been one

Adapting to the conditions as they are found

of the biggest professional development tools we've had." It also allows for collaboration among teachers, and for leaders in different content areas to emerge and to share with their colleagues. Frost was quick to point out the support the school has had from a team of literacy, math, and Montessori coaches. "I don't think we could have done this without them."

This took us to the discussion of so-called "learning loss." "We were able—another testament to the coaches—to screen all of our students in the fall, for how the spring had impacted them." Frost said. "By December we had everyone screened and intervention groups set up. The school was able to track engagement with online learning and a summer program, and to make adjustments to increase access or to raise engagement. "Next year, it's less about access and more about our level of planning." The intensive lesson planning process Tobin developed has helped identify potentially missed lessons and directed interventions to support phonics and literacy, for example.

"The fall is really going to be about the social-emotional aspect," Frost added. "What does it mean to be back in school as a community, and work together." Gutierrez chimed in: "Some kids will not have been in a school building for 12-15 months—what does that feel like? It's a lot like adding a new level to a classroom. The kids who have been back may be fine, but the others add a level of complexity. And then there's the teacher stress around that—how do we support them? We need to tell them, 'it's OK that you can't do all the things. What can you do, and how can we support each other?'"

One last take-away from Frost: "We are thinking about learning gaps, definitely. But in my opinion, what it's really about for next fall is, how are we supporting kids just being joyful?—coming back to school and saying, I love being here."

Jamie Frost is the Principal at Tobin Montessori School, and Erin Gutierrez is the Montessori Specialist.

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MontessoriPublic is a digital and print communications and advocacy platform for public Montessori, presenting news and information about public schools, publicly supported programs, public policy, and relevant ideas and events in education.

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Montessori and the future

Maria Montessori's view of human unity

BY **MARY ELLEN MAUNZ**

Today, in the era of COVID-19, is so different from yesterday that it is difficult to know what tomorrow will be like. There is talk of going "back to normal" or to a "new normal," but the only way we can ever go is forward. Humankind is ever-evolving and ever-adapting to the conditions in which we find ourselves and using our native ingenuity to solve problems large and small. Today is a new day and we try to rejoice in it however we can.

A time of soul-searching and deep reflection

Our nation and the Montessori movement are in a period of deep soul-searching, trying to come to terms with the facts of our past, of slavery both in the United States and many other nations and of racial and gender inequities. We are seeking to balance the deeply flawed parts of our past with the gifts of profound freedom our nation has given us and that we so prize in our Montessori classrooms. We are deeply engaged in pondering and reflecting because we honestly want to be better people. We know psychologically and spiritually that, until we can see our internal issues and biases, we cannot let them go. This vital process of self-searching is for the purpose of change. While change is difficult, the resources for real transformation are deep in our hearts. As we identify biases in deep-seated thinking patterns in one or another, do we let them define us or can we surrender them and truly change? Can we make certain that what we learn is reflected in our relationships and our classroom environments?

It is my observation that some folks are beating themselves up, and at times disrespecting and judging others around them as they undergo this deep, unsettling process. Maybe it is helpful to envision a pendulum, which goes from one extreme to the other and gradually comes to a point of balance. We may be moving away from ignorance (i.e., either ignoring what we know to be true or simply not knowing) toward intense scrutiny and self-awareness. Montessori wrote: "All spiritual development is a conquest of consciousness, which assumes to itself something that was formerly outside. It is by going along this road of discovery that civilization advances." In other words, we have to take what we are learning and internalize it. We can grow.

In her writings on the spiritual preparation of the teacher, Montessori reminds us that pride and anger are the two essential blocks to having a quality relationship with children. Perhaps all the various "isms" that we seek to root out are subtle variations on the pride that exists within us.

There are always children

But the most important thing is that there are always children who need us. Now, more than ever, we are needed by children the world around. They require love and balance and the richness that the Montessori prepared environment and the prepared adult can give to them.

We are deeply engaged in pondering and reflecting because we honestly want to be better people

Maria Montessori taught us to see the child who is not yet there. If we are to thrive in the present and the future, we can do it with grace, with tolerance for current imperfections, and with great love. She taught us that our job is not to judge but to help life.

In 1949, just three short years before her passing, Maria Montessori gave a series of lectures in San Remo, Italy, at the 8th International Montessori Congress. She talked a great deal about building a new world and the importance of history. One of her lectures was called "Human Solidarity in Time and Space." It offers profound food for thought with numerous examples, reminds us to look at an essential truth of human unity, and gives us a great task.

There are always children

Essential unity

Montessori argues that, while we persist in thinking that we must educate men to achieve world unity, it already exists through trade, travel, and the exchange of ideas and goods. Ties of solidarity exist, and it is essential to help people to become conscious of this reality. Those of us who are Montessori elementary teachers know this theme well from the parable of the Great River and Montessori's cosmic plan.

> *A great obstacle to what I call cultivation of humanity is the prevalent opinion that men are selfish. Men suffer because they believe they are selfish, while, well considered in general they are not. How can a man be selfish who works for the good of his fellow men, often under the direst of circumstances? The baker, for example, who rises before dawn to make sure people will have their fresh, crusty bread in the early morning? The shoemaker, who provides shoes so that others may walk in comfort?*
>
> *And the educator, the teacher who instructs the small strangers entrusted to his care, welcoming all who come, not choosing one and rejecting another, giving equally his understanding to all?*

Montessori goes on to reflect on the fact that humanity is stuck in thinking about economic and material benefits, the satisfaction of vanity, a desire to be thought well of, and "ambition pure and simple" above everything else. She says we must fight this "flawed and dangerous" attitude. We would look more deeply into what makes us one and understand why we are here rather than creating superficial divisions.

> *This is the great task of education: to make the child conscious of the reality and depth of human unity.… We must explain, by precise and logical analysis, the origin and the essence of this great human brotherhood. Above all, we must make the children understand how extraordinarily moving it is that men are not united by their interests alone, but that a deeper bond exists at the very root of their brotherhood.*

As we deeply feel the unity of all mankind and strive for a future that meets the needs of every human being, we know that this is indeed Montessori's essential message of "help to life."

Mary Ellen Maunz, M.Ed., is the Founder and Program Director of Age of Montessori, a teacher education program in Bozeman, Montana.

Focusing on students at Breakthrough

Adaptations that keep development at the center

EMILY HEDIN
INTERVIEWED BY **DAVID AYER**

Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School is a charter school in Washington, DC, founded by the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector in 2016 and now serving 300+ children from three years old through 2nd grade. MontessoriPublic sat down with Executive Director Emily Hedin to talk about this year and plans for the fall.

MontessoriPublic: How did Breakthrough initially respond to the pandemic—have you been face-to-face with children at all?

Emily Hedin: Breakthrough closed completely on March 13, 2020. We remained fully virtual in the fall, and we are fully virtual still. We have a small cohort of students who come onsite to do their virtual learning from school, but all instruction has been delivered virtually, using SeeSaw, sending materials home, things like that.

MP: How did that work for the primary versus the elementary?

EH: In some ways, it was smoother with the lower elementary, because students are making the transition to abstract thinking, so there's not as strong a need for visual and tactile materials. Elementary students are also developing the skills of dialogue and discussion, which is work that can continue in the virtual space. Where it's more challenging is this: since we are a public school, there's more pressure to move them along a spectrum of skill development. They are the students that do the high-stakes standardized assessments and for whom the city is carefully tracking growth. While moving their instruction to the virtual space was easier in some respects, there's more stress involved with ensuring that students are accessing the lessons, content, and skills that they need to be.

MP: Did you have testing waivers?

EH: DC is suspending the PARCC testing for this year, and the DC Public Charter School Board is publishing "descriptive" School Quality Reports for schools rather than scoring and tiers. But even though there's a one-year reprieve, I wouldn't say that lightens the pressure, because those assessments will return, and we need to be sure our students will be successful on them when they do.

MP: How do the "tiers" work—and where does Breakthrough stand?

EH: We're in Tier II, which is in the middle—Tier III is low performing, Tier II is middle performing, and Tier I is high performing. Tier III means you are on an improvement plan. We were Tier III in 2017-18, Tier II in 2018-19, and there was no ranking for 2019-20 or this year.

MP: What did you do to move up?

EH: A really careful review of the NWEA MAP assessment, and a thoughtful alignment with the Montessori scope and sequence—not straying from the Montessori, but understanding which lessons and materials lend themselves to students being ready to demonstrate certain skills.

MP: So what happens now? When do you get to go back, and what's the plan?

This pandemic did not have a uniform impact on all families and children

EH: We will return to in-person instruction on April 19th, with almost 70% of our students, and continuing until June 16th. We're pretty excited—it's a tremendous amount of work to get ready, but we're optimistic that it will be a positive experience for students. Three-year-olds will do two half-days a week, four-year-olds will do three half-days, and K through third grade will do four. They will have in-person instruction in the mornings and continue with asynchronous virtual learning in the afternoons.

MP: And for the fall?

EH: We haven't begun to plan in earnest for September for two reasons. One, it's all hands on deck to be ready for April 19th. And two, I don't want to dive too deeply in to planning for next year until we've identified some lessons learned from this spring. Right now, we're hypothesizing a great deal about students' academic, social-emotional, and mental health needs. Once we're back in the classroom, we'll collect observational, qualitative data on their needs. And that will inform the approach in the fall. Also, we'll get feedback from guides and assistants on the workload and the feasibility of what we're asking them to do. Their instructional responsibilities haven't changed, and when you add on to that the cleaning protocols and increased need to be instructing students on masking, social distancing, etc., we may be looking at a redefinition of the scope of teaching.

So before we dive too deep into what next year will look like, we want to see and hear from our staff about how the spring has gone.

MP: I know it's controversial, but do you have an opinion on "learning loss"?

MP: My discomfort around the conversations about learning loss are around the scale of the issue. The beauty of Montessori is that we see each child as an individual. There are children who are losing ground. There are children who are not following the natural developmental progression that they would be if they had had access to the prepared environment. So there are students we need to focus a great deal of time and energy on, to be sure we are doing right by them. That we are helping them along their way, and they aren't unduly hampered by the pandemic.

There are also children who have continued to learn during virtual learning, continued to develop skills and explore their own capabilities and interests.

So my discomfort around learning loss stems from blanket statements—that this pandemic was any one thing for students. I can't say virtual learning was either a success or a failure at Breakthrough, because this pandemic did not have a uniform impact on all families and children. There have been families that have been profoundly inconvenienced by this pandemic, but have their basic needs met, or even have an excess of resources, and the health and well-being of their children was never seriously in jeopardy. And then we have families who have experienced tremendous volatility in their finances, housing, employment, access to resources, including food and housing. And we have families who have lost a great deal, who are experiencing grief and trauma. And in light of that, that does create obstacles to a child's healthy, normal natural development.

Families are coming out of this with a much stronger understanding of Montessori

So being the Montessorian that I am, each child's story and needs are unique, and it's absolutely our intention to marshal all their resources we need to best support the children who have been most adversely affected by the pandemic

MP: But it does sound like there are going to be some, say, five-year-olds, who didn't explode into reading. What might you be able to do?

EH: You're right, none of our threes and fours had access to the language rich environment to develop their phonological awareness to be ready to explode into reading and writing in the kindergarten year.

In the perfect world, all children would enter the prepared environment at three years old. But we're a public school, so we accept children at all grades when there's space available. So we're taking in threes, fours, first graders who have never seen the Moveable Alphabet or Sandpaper Letters. They haven't had the

gift of time to really develop that strong base for language and literacy before coming to us. So we've been looking at—not how can we replace Montessori, but how can we provide additional scaffolding so that all children have access to Montessori? We've looked at things like Orton-Gillingham, Waseca, American Reading Company. These resources don't diminish the child's experience in the prepared environment—they don't take away the freedom of choice and movement, and the gift of time, but they do provide additional resources to help bridge access to the children who did not have access to the environment and help them gain entry to the Montessori experience.

MP: Were there adaptations you might keep in place? Lessons learned?

EH: Literacy is an area where we learned a lot. In the virtual setting, we really took a structured approach to one-on-one and small-group instruction in core literacy skills. That's not something that necessarily would have happened in the traditional Montessori environment. But we found that not only has it helped carry students through the year, but when we return, and we have students for whom the Montessori scope and sequence is not enough to help them become fluent readers, we have developed very specific detailed one-on-one interventions focused on building discrete skills to help students get to reading fluency.

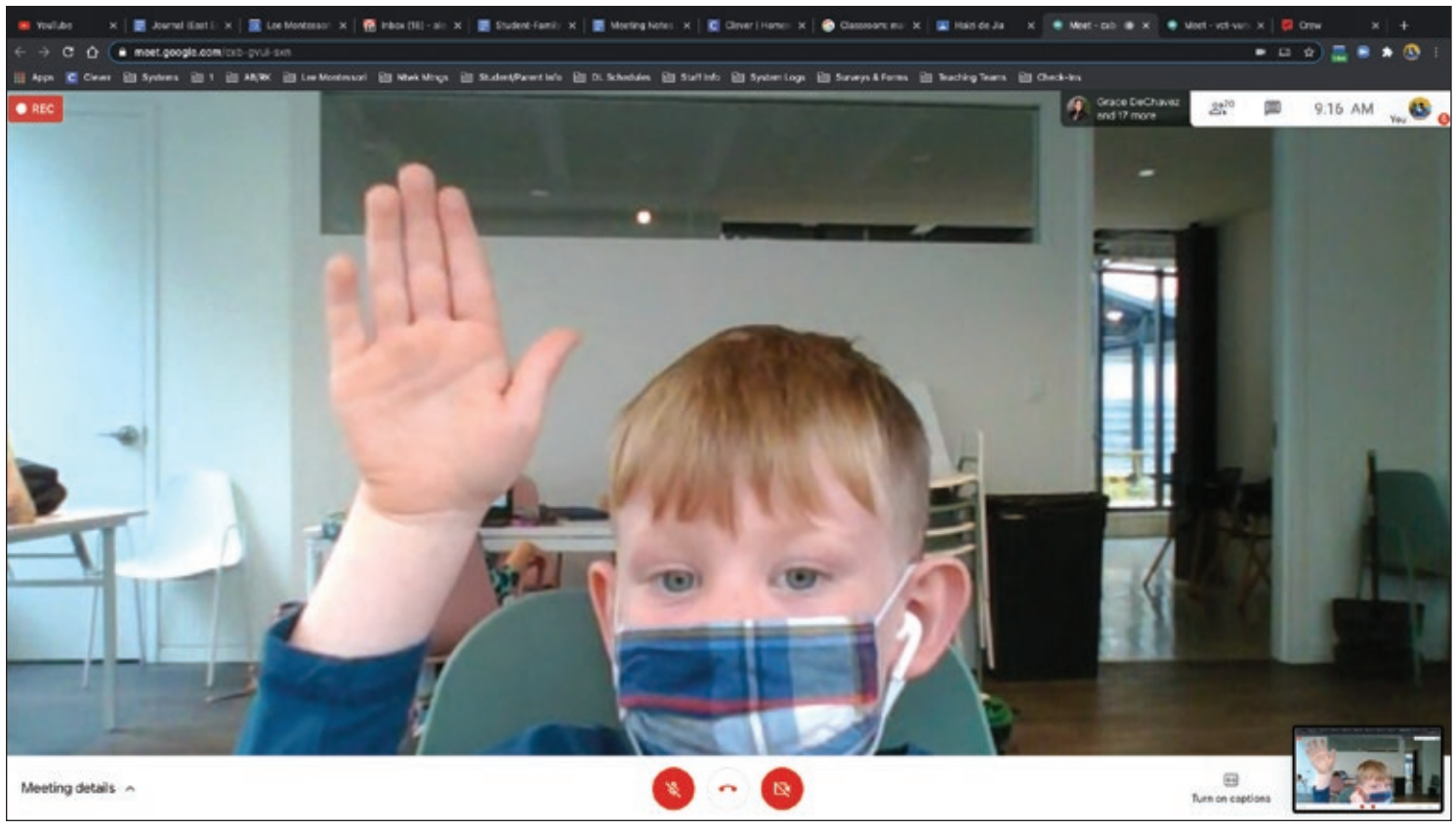
Another area is family engagement. This year, I met with families weekly on Zoom. In live learning, I had physical touch points, but we only met monthly, and I don't think I'm going back to that. Maybe interest will wane over time, but I think it's been an incredible gift for families to get such an intimate look into their child's education and our instructional process. Families are coming out of this with a much stronger understanding of Montessori than they had before the pandemic, and I want to leverage that, keep them at the table, keep them as thought partners, and continue to support their child's education at home. The gap between parent and guide has shrunk, and I want to keep it that way.

Emily Hedin is the Executive Director of Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School in Washington, DC.

Back to the classroom at Lee

Returning to in-person learning brings challenges, opportunities

BY **DAVID AYER**



It's good to see you back at school

Lee Montessori, short for Lee Public Montessori Charter Schools, operates two public charter Montessori schools in Washington DC. *MontessoriPublic* has reported on Lee before, most recently in the Fall 2020 issue (*Learning COVID lessons at Lee*), where we spoke with East End campus Assistant Head of School Rachel Kimboko about the school's adaptations to the pandemic. We connected back up with Kimboko for this issue to talk about how things went this year and the outlook for the fall, and she brought Director of Equity and Engagement Betsy Romero, Director of Student Support Denise Miles, and Brookland campus Assistant Head of School Karli Hurlebaus into the conversation.

Miles and Romero shared their own perspectives on the adaptations at Lee beginning in the spring of 2020. "The spring offered a huge learning opportunity," Kimboko said. "Like many Montessori programs, we had to very quickly stand up a lot of digital learning platforms." Lee, like many schools, had at first expected to be back in person in the fall, but when it became clear that that wouldn't be happening, both campuses launched an intensive program of planning curriculum, getting staff and families on board with various platforms and technology, and a coordinated virtual family education program. (These elements are described in more detail in the Fall 2020 issue of MontessoriPublic.)

I asked Romero about equity disparities in access to technology and remote learning. The school was intentional about assessing families' needs for technology. Because Lee doesn't use a lot of computers in their Montessori classrooms, they couldn't expect families to necessarily have access to or fluency with, for example, laptops and webcams. Some families just might not have those resources, and some families may have chosen Montessori precisely because of the lesser use of technology for younger children. Lee worked hard to build up an inventory of laptops to share, which wasn't easy—"the entire world was trying to get Chromebooks!"

Language barriers compounded technology barriers in some cases. Bilingual staff stepped up to support families, translating and even modeling, and teaching families who came into the building to pick up laptops and learn new platforms and skills. The school launched a portal for families to log in to where they could then access platforms such as SeeSaw, Google Classroom, HeadSprout, and STMath. "For families that barely used email, this was a lot," Romero said. (Nationally, just 7% of Americans report that they do not use the internet, but that percentage is higher among Black Americans (9%), older adults (25%), and people earning less than $30,000 per year. When you consider the challenges faced by a family where the primary daytime caregiver might be an older, non-working family member, you can imagine some of the difficulties faced.)

I asked if the detailed curriculum and family engagement program Lee implemented in the fall had raised family awareness and appreciation of the Montessori approach now that it was in their living rooms. "Yes—and…" was the response. "We're grateful that families have fallen in love, at a deeper level, with Montessori, and that they understand the beauty of the Montessori method and how it helps children learn." But with the return to in-person learning, they will lose some of that access and interaction they may have enjoyed. But really what's happening is a return to the classroom-based model, with lessons, choices, and uninterrupted work cycles, that drew them to Montessori in the first place.

Kimboko pointed out that as many as half of the East End children (where there are only primary students so far) haven't set foot in a Montessori classroom in a year and a half, if at all, since they started in fall 2019 or enrolled as new children this year. So there will be an adjustment period for them as they adapt to a new environment.

The spring offered a huge learning opportunity

So what happens now? Students will be back face-to-face on May 3rd, two weeks after Spring Break. That date was set back when the school thought they might need to allow for a quarantine for families that may have traveled over break, and before widespread vaccination was seen as likely. However, it won't be a completely cold start—since February, Lee has offered classrooms where children can come to the building for virtual learning, largely for children that had experienced more challenges—academic, logistical, etc.—with virtual learning. And Lee has offered "academy style" classrooms at each level, where some students have been able to come in one day per week to pilot a hybrid model, with social distancing, masks, and other protocols. After May 3rd, school will continue with half-class cohorts attending school for two full days per week at a time, with a cleaning day in between.

I asked the team about so-called "learning loss," and any assessments they may be using to see what additional needs children may have. The school has been using the DESSA social-emotional assessment all year to gauge how children are doing in that area. For academic assessment, Lee uses NWEA MAP, and will do another round in May. They have found these tools useful to predict how children will do. As the person who oversees special education and interventions, Miles said, "I've been in a lot of conversations about perceived learning loss. Everyone has lost learning, so it's just a different state of being. There are

opportunities to make up some of that time, but right now it's about making sure we go slow to go fast, checking on everyone's emotional health, re-engaging them in structures, and encouraging them to love learning in person. But if wellness isn't in place, we know learning becomes extremely more difficult."

Romero offered an equity perspective: "Sometimes we tend to forget that we're still in a pandemic, and the standards are the same, which isn't realistic. Everyone's 24 hours aren't the same, and everyone's approach to learning at home isn't the same. We have single parent-families, working families with three children, etc. We're trying to be sure we're being graceful with families—and staff! This has been hard on them too. So we're really looking at how we're prioritizing self-care and wellness, for children, families, and staff. You can't pour from an empty cup."

We're grateful that families have fallen in love, at a deeper level, with Montessori

I pressed a little on academics and the equity issue. If the so-called "achievement gap" is better thought of as an "opportunity gap", surely not everyone had the same opportunities this year. What can be done about that to be sure those children don't fall further behind? Miles addresses this: "We're working on recovery planning—what does recovery look like across the board? We're using Child Study, and we sometimes say 'everyone needs their own action plan.' How do you think about that in a way that doesn't totally overwhelm the system." She talked about how to use special education resources, and possibly a summer program in collaboration with other DC Montessori schools. DC's Mayor has called for a full return to school in the fall. If that happens, maybe beforecare and aftercare could support "recovery" of academics—of course, it would need to be made accessible to all families who need it. Romero said that her fear as a parent and educator was that "we might put too much focus on academics, not on relationship building." Virtual learning has taken a toll on those skills, and children will need to relearn them before they can really advance their academic learning.

I asked if there are "silver linings" from this pandemic year. What did they learn that might be carried forward after this year? Miles speculated about how schools, like other businesses coming out of the pandemic, might explore how some level of remote work might be possible—virtual staff meetings maybe? And Kimboko added that this could work for families as well: "We've learned we can have effective meetings virtually, and it can literally make the difference for someone attending a FTA meeting or family night. Nothing beats being in person and getting to see the lesson being given, but there are things we can do. I think it has forced us to really distill down to what is essential in the curriculum, and what experiences really meet children's developmental needs?"

Finally, I asked, "How did Montessori in the world do this year, not just at Lee?" Like many families who were able to work from home—which was a privilege not everyone enjoyed—Romero valued being home with her children, perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime chance. Miles said her daughter was already pretty self-directed from her Montessori experience, and she was able to maintain that and stay engaged with virtual education. And Brookland Assistant Head of School chimed in at the end

"How did Montessori do? The best we could with what we were given. I've seen a lot of people rise to challenges that they didn't know they could, and really excel and make beautiful things happen. As much as we could, we tried to keep children's best interests, and how we know they learn, centered, even though we had to make accommodations. But we did a good job of asking, every time we made a decision, is this the best thing we can do for children right now? And as long as we kept asking that question, we came pretty close to a yes."

David Ayer, Communications Director at the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, asked the questions, and Director of Equity and Engagement Betsy Romero, Director of Student Support Denise Miles, East End Assistant Head of School Rachel Kimboko and Brookland campus Assistant Head of School Karli Hurlebaus were generous with their time.

Behavior support informed by Peace Literacy

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the development of children offer important correctives to traditional educational models—insights that we believe should be made more widely available—this model offers important correctives to PBIS that should also be widely adopted.

Weaknesses of PBIS, especially for Montessori

While PBIS focuses on rewards rather than punishments, it still keeps a focus exclusively on behavior and its management. But extensive evidence makes clear that "behaviors" are merely observable symptoms of deeper issues, often including trauma. Attempts to modify behavior without understanding the underlying problem will only take us so far, and for many children that is not far enough.

In addition, positive consequences or rewards for behavior build extrinsic motivation at the expense of helping children develop intrinsic motivation. Montessori made clear that the intrinsic motivation is key. Any documented gains from the PBIS focus on extrinsic motivations are thus likely to be short-lived and restricted to very particular contexts.

PBIS typically views behavioral change as a pre-requisite to successful academic study, rather than an integral part of academics. Research into social-emotional learning informed by Peace Literacy reinforces and extends Montessori's insights that social and behavioral development is the child's primary work and needs to be trained, modeled, and practiced as a literacy in its own right, as an academic subject of elementary and middle school (and higher grades to the extent possible), and around which other academic subjects can be organized.

"Behaviors" are merely observable symptoms of deeper issues

The systemic support offered by most PBIS approaches does not center the perspective of the child, if indeed the child's view is included at all. Montessori has shown us why a focus on the child is so critical, and why its absence is a problem. Too often PBIS approaches inscribe unidirectional power *over* children by teachers, rather than collaboratively building relations of power *with* children, teachers, and caregivers, In other words, PBIS approaches too often "reinstate order" at the expense of "establishing justice."

In societies like the US structured inequitably around race, the focus on "order" becomes particularly problematic. Educators tend to have absorbed implicit biases about "order," who needs it, and what counts as violating it, which disproportionately penalize young Black children, especially Black boys. By focusing on behavior rather than the cultural and community contexts within which some children's behaviors become salient and others not, PBIS approaches can exacerbate existing social inequities. The focus on behavior was meant to make PBIS more objective, but ironically, by stripping behavioral analysis of its cultural and community context, PBIS can contribute to racial and other inequities.

Finally, the tripartite structure of most PBIS frameworks has the emphasis on interventions and supports precisely backwards. Built on a base of so-called "universal interventions and supports" deemed sufficient for the behavioral growth of most children, and moving up in a pyramid fashion to the secondary or targeted interventions and supports seen as necessary for growth in a smaller group of children, most PBIS systems reserve tertiary and intensive interventions and supports for a minority of children who present particularly challenging behaviors.

The modified approach we prescribe recognizes first that the children behaving in particularly challenging ways are no longer a small minority in any given classroom and that, regardless of their number, the behaviors they exhibit indicate a larger problem in our society which deserves universal attention. Just as disability rights activists have argued successfully that accommodations for people with disabilities ultimately help everyone ("universal design"), so too, attention to the problems these "tertiary" children struggle with can provide insights valuable to everyone in the school setting, including educators, administrators, caregivers, and community members. These behaviors are symptomatic of a broader ecological problem in our schools, communities, and families. Students who do not exhibit these behaviors are not necessarily healthy and thriving; often they have merely found ways to adapt

Contemplating mathematical order

to this problematic ecology. Rather than rewarding their adaptation to a maladaptive ecology, we want to educate children to help change the ecology.

A Montessori model informed by Peace Literacy

The modified approach we endorse conforms to typical state requirements for PBIS and builds on the insights of Montessori to which we are all committed. It is based on Paul K. Chappell's new paradigm for trauma-informed education: Peace Literacy. Increasing peace literacy for all members of our learning communities requires us to work on three elements:

- increasing the accuracy of our understanding about the world and our place in it
- learning and practicing new skills
- building capacities

A Montessori school guided by the needs of the developing child and dedicated to building a culture of peace and justice, requires all of us–children and adults alike–to develop our Peace Literacy by recognizing and supporting the following foundational principles:

We all have non-physical needs, such as needs for belonging, purpose and meaning, nurturing relationships, and transcendence. Developing peace literacy involves understanding these non-physical needs and taking them seriously as drivers of human behavior. These needs are so strong that if we can't meet them in healthful ways, we'll meet them in unhealthful ways. To help children meet these needs in healthful ways, adults must prepare an environment where children can work uninterrupted, transcending their sense of time, in a community of healthy belonging, with minimal but nurturing supervision, on tasks that provide them with purpose and meaning. The Nautilus Approach (montessori-action.org) provides a roadmap for helping children with their work, and helping them return to that work when it is interrupted. When we adults prepare this kind of environment for children, it helps us meet our needs as well.

We all want to do well if we can. Humans generally, and children in particular, typically want to help others and to live up to positive expectations others set for them. When we find that we, or our colleagues, or the children in our care, aren't doing well, aren't performing to expectations, it is common to make judgments of laziness, unwillingness to learn, or attention- seeking.

In societies structured inequitably around race, the focus on "order" becomes particularly problematic

However, these judgments are based on explanations that are inaccurate because they focus only on symptoms. And, this focus on symptoms contributes to inequities in the classroom, especially for children of color. According to Ross Greene, when we aren't doing well, a more accurate and equitable explanation gets to the root: there is a gap in our understanding, skills, and/or capacities, that makes us unable to meet a challenge we've experienced in the learning environment.

We can all feel the "fires of distress" when we encounter a gap in our understanding, skills, and/or capacities. These fires can look like frustration, shame, or fear, and children and adults alike sometimes respond to the fires of distress with the heat of aggression. Conflicts and challenges are inevitable in any learning community, but aggressive responses are not. To effectively mitigate the heat of aggression, we need to understand and attend to the fire of distress at the root of the aggressive behavior by deploying our skills in listening and cultivating calm, and by flexing our capacities for empathy, imagination, and conscience.

We can all help each other if we encounter a gap, experience distress, and respond with aggression. What challenge in the learning environment is at the root of the distress? Have we understood our non-physical needs? Do we have the skills to meet those needs in a healthful way? Have we built the capacities needed for exercising those skills? Greene's Collaborative Proactive Solutions model suggests a way forward. When we work collaboratively with the children in our care, to identify the challenge in the environment that is causing the distress, when we get help understanding the relevant needs, learning the skills, and building the capacities, then we can close the gap, lower the distress, and mitigate the aggression. Zaretta Hammond emphasizes that these kinds of collaborations ought not to characterize the gaps as deficits, but as problems to solve, and that each child brings unique strengths and solutions from which we can all learn.

We can all help each other increase our understanding, learn skills, and build our capacities— to develop our literacy in peace. In addition to traditional academic subjects, we can build on social emotional learning outcomes to include:

- Understanding our nonphysical needs and how to meet those needs in healthful ways
- Learning the skills of recognizing when we are in distress (and when trauma is the cause of that distress) and for empathizing with that distress rather than responding with aggression
- Building our capacity for empathy, conscience, and hope

These learning outcomes are designed to prepare children to be engaged citizens working for peace and justice. Helping children develop their Peace Literacy is a key academic subject for primary education. **Peace Literacy is their work. It is our work.**

Sharyn Clough is a professor of philosophy at Oregon State University, the author of many scholarly essays on Peace Literacy research and pedagogy, and the curriculum coordinator for Peace Literacy.

Paul K. Chappell, West Point graduate and Iraq war veteran, is the founder of Peace Literacy and Executive Director of the Peace Literacy Institute.

Jacqui Miller is the Director, Montessori Programming and Operations for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

Natalie Celeste is the Principal of Tremont Montessori School, a preschool-8th grade public Montessori school in Cleveland, Ohio.

Photos courtesy of Tremont Montessori School

Living up to positive expectations

Culturally responsive

continued from page 1

1. Equity and Excellence
2. Teaching and Empowering the Whole Child
3. Constructivism
4. Strong and Positive Relationships
5. Respect for Culture

The authors went on to interview 12 adults (ten Black, two Hispanic, and one white) who attended an independent, Black-led Montessori school in Washington, D.C., in the 1980s and 1990s. Their recollections showed an alignment with their lived experience of Montessori education and the principles of CRP:

Black children thrive in Montessori, based on academic achievement and discipline disproportionality

Equity: Differentiation and self-determination

"I think definitely the Montessori environment let me know that I could identify what it is that I'm interested in, capitalize on those things, learn those materials, perfect those materials at my own pace, and then move forward on to the next project."

Excellent academic preparation

"I was kind of in the more advanced group [in conventional school], as far as like math and reading, things like that, and even, I would say, probably like behavior. And I think part of that is due to parental involvement and things like that, but part of it is also I think due to the exposure I was given at [Montessori]."

Empowerment

"Again and again it gave me the confidence to keep going and being in a competitive academic environment. It gave me that confidence to succeed and go on and further my education."

Constructivism:

"[Other] students that ... been taught only one way, maybe at the expense of conceptual understanding, of kind of why things were that way, or how things look, and spatial relations."

Relationships:

"Montessori taught me a very good social skillset, which allowed me to transition easily [to conventional school in first grade]…I learned about interacting with kids, how to deal with conflict, how to share, sitting in circles, and listening to instruments."

Respect for culture:

"We had a diverse class—mostly people from all different ethnicities." The one White respondent said, "I appreciate…the fact that it was normal to be in such a diverse community and that it took me a long time [to see] that that wasn't normal for every White kid to have that. And I think that has shaped a lot of how I see the world."

The authors conclude that:

"No excuses schools are intended to promote equality by bringing more Black children to and through college, but they are problematic from a social justice lens. We have shown that Montessori education is not only well aligned with the principles of CRP, but also that Black children thrive in Montessori based on metrics like academic achievement and discipline disproportionality.… For these reasons, Montessori should be more closely considered and more fully implemented as an alternative approach for the education of all children."

Dr. Angeline Lillard is the Director of the Early Development Lab at the University of Virginia. Jessica Taggart is a Postdoctoral Research Associate at the lab. Daniel Yonas is a Doctoral Student at Columbia University in the City of New York. Nia Seale is the Director of Training at AMI Montessori Study Centre in Lagos, Nigeria.

Doubling Public Montessori in Georgia by 2026

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Why now?

Now is the moment to act. The American Rescue Plan Act, signed into law in March 2021, will send $4.25 billion to Georgia school districts. Appropriately, at least 20% of that funding must be used to help address student learning loss related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The use of the remaining funding is broadly flexible. For districts that are ready to invest in a new way of approaching education, one that supports each child's individual needs and social-emotional learning while delivering an education that is both student-centered and highly structured, both rigorous and joyous, the opportunity has arrived.

A Montessori incubator

It's not difficult for a school district to decide to pursue Montessori. To gain the knowledge and make the commitments needed to follow through with a sustainable, high-fidelity Montessori program, though, is much more of a challenge. Questions district and school leaders will need to address include:

- What training will we seek for our teachers, administrators, specialists and instructional support team? How will we fund Montessori training? How will we ensure the existence of a pipeline of qualified teachers for future openings?
- How will we fund three-year-olds in a way that ensures our Montessori classes reflect the economic diversity of our community?
- What changes need to be made to establish three-year, mixed-age Montessori classes?
  - Which school buildings will need to have different age groupings of children than they have now?
  - How will this impact school funding, transportation, testing, personnel, and available space?
  - Beyond offering quality teacher training, how can we further support our teachers in addressing the needs of a 3-year mixed-age group?
- What changes can we make to our physical classroom and outdoor spaces, to support the Montessori program?
- How can we adjust our schedules to ensure that every Montessori class has an uninterrupted three-hour work time every day? How will lunch, playground time, and specialty teacher schedules need to adjust?
- What staff do we need at the district level to support the Montessori programs? At the classroom level? How can we provide a paraprofessional in every Montessori Children's House and Elementary class?
- What tools will we use for assessing children, teachers, classrooms and the program as a whole?
- How will we provide ongoing coaching and professional development for our Montessori team members?
- Which district requirements will remain in place within the Montessori program, and which will be waived?
- How will we build the Montessori program up over time?

To guide districts through these decisions, Montessori Partnerships for Georgia is designing a Montessori incubator program that districts will apply to be part of. Selected districts will send two to three team members to a series of monthly meetings, with individualized guidance and structured support to work through the decisions needed to implement a new Montessori program. Participating districts will receive partial subsidies for initial teacher training and preferred purchasing status with Practical Lifesavers, our Montessori materials rescue program.

A key partnership

In the first phase of the Montessori Incubator, we are thrilled to be partnering with Dr. Kathaleena Monds of Albany State University to introduce Montessori to school districts and early learning centers in Southwest Georgia. This area of the state is mostly rural, includes many districts with majority-Black populations, and is more than two hours' drive from the nearest existing public Montessori schools.

Albany State, a nationally top-ranked HBCU founded in 1903, is part of the University System of Georgia. Dr. Monds is the founding director of The Center for Educational Opportunity, which provides support for K-12 research on educational innovations, opportunities, access, and models germane to students living in fragile communities.

Dr. Monds and I will kick off the partnership by coauthoring a white paper, "Why Montessori for Southwest Georgia?" and hosting a webinar to reach out to southwest Georgia district leaders, teachers, parents and Head Start providers. The Center for Educational Opportunity already has a strong relationship with nearby school districts as well as with the Southwest Georgia Community Action Council, which provides Head Start for southwest Georgia. As the incubator moves into the implementation stage, we will partner with researchers from the Center to explore the effectiveness of Montessori in Georgia public schools.

Next steps

As we bring the Montessori Incubator program to life, we are seeking additional partnerships to move it forward. We have opened conversations with several teacher training programs and are particularly excited about partnering with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector to bring their Montessori Teacher Residency to southwest Georgia.

In addition, we are seeking funding partners to support the incubator so that school districts, many of which work on very tight budgets (especially in the rural parts of the state), can focus their available funds on training teachers and equipping classrooms.

We are so excited at the partnerships we're developing to expand access to Montessori across the state, and thrilled to continue building on this synergy to reach our goal of doubling the number of Georgia districts offering public Montessori by 2026.

Annie Frazer is the Executive Director of Montessori Partnerships for Georgia.

Montessori Partnerships for Georgia is designing a Montessori incubator program

Public Montessori in the Low Country

How one district opened six schools over 24 years

BY **RACHEL YOUNG**

Editor's note: From time to time, the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector gets inquiries about how to start a new public Montessori school. It's a hard question, because the full answer is something like, "Spend a year figuring out what the possibilities are in your state and district, and deciding if this is really something you want to do. Then spend at least another year planning, preparing, getting allies and stakeholders on board, before you are even close to launching."

Yet Charleston County has gone from no public Montessori to six schools in the last 24 years, along a variety of avenues:

- *a private Montessori school converting to a district choice program*
- *a private Montessori school converting to a district-authorized charter*
- *a district-driven conversion of four conventional district schools to Montessori choice programs*

Here, Rachel Young, Montessori Lead Consultant for the district, traces the history of this growth.

1997 had its share of noteworthy events: the movie "Titanic" was released, the first Harry Potter book was published, Steve Jobs returned to Apple, and the Teletubbies were unleashed. But for the parents and students in the Charleston County School District (CCSD, at 50,000 students the second-largest district in South Carolina), one of the most noteworthy was that the district opened its first public Montessori school. Montessori Community School opened its doors with 65 students and three classrooms: one primary, one lower elementary, and one upper elementary.

Montessori Community School (MCS) had originally been a private Montessori school until Kim Hay, parent and board member, decided that in order to be accessible to more students, "We just needed to become a public school." Fortunately for Hay, the CCSD superintendent at the time, Chip Zullinger, was a catalyst for change, and he was very interested in bringing parent-driven school choice options to the district. MCS became one of those school choice options.

However, it was not an easy process, as Hay found out. Everything had to be invented from scratch: the lottery process for admission, budgeting, busing…you name it, had to be thought through and planned out. Hay did all of this work with the district's liaison, Barbara Hess. Hess's message to Hay was, "If you can figure it all out, I'll bring it to the CCSD board for approval." Hay took advantage of the positive climate within the district for her ideas and presented and pushed for elements of Montessori education that Montessorians would consider non-negotiables.

Hay got the district to agree to fund three-year-olds so that the primary classroom had the three-year age span, and sixth grade was added to the upper elementary for the same reason. She insisted that classrooms needed the full complement of Montessori materials and Montessori trained teachers. She informed the district that they would not be issuing traditional grades and they would be using a different format for their report card. Amazingly, the district agreed to all of this and Montessori Community School of Charleston was born.

The future of public Montessori

A few years later, across the peninsula in Mount Pleasant, another public Montessori school was in the works. Jody Swanigan, a long time Montessori teacher, was looking to do something similar to what Hay had done at MCS albeit through a different route. Swanigan, along with parent support, was looking to take the Montessori of Mount Pleasant Elementary School, a private school, through the charter process to become the first public charter Montessori school in CCSD. In 2003, the Charleston County School District approved five public charter schools within the district and East Cooper Charter Montessori School was one of them. Swanigan's school started in a humble trailer with just three Lower Elementary classrooms and 77 students. In successive years, East Cooper Charter Montessori School would expand to

offer programs from three years old through eighth grade, becoming the largest public Montessori school in the district.

In 2006, LaDene Conroy, the principal at Malcom C. Hursey, was approached by the CCSD superintendent, Dr. Nancy McGinley, with the idea of transitioning Hursey's traditional program to a Montessori program. Conroy threw herself into the process, even taking the same Montessori teacher training that her teachers were enrolled in. From there, Conroy and McGinley began to envision a plan where all students throughout the district could access Montessori education. But this would mean opening a lot more schools. School leaders began to realize that there was no lack of parent support, and there was no lack of students, but there was a great lack of Montessori certified teachers.

To resolve this issue, Dr. Ginny Riga, the South Carolina Department of Education Montessori Coordinator, along with Jody Swanigan and members of the South Carolina Montessori Alliance (SCMA), petitioned the State legislature to approve an alternate route for teacher candidates to obtain a South Carolina educator certificate through Montessori training. In 2010 the state legislature approved a bill for this alternate certification. If teacher candidates held a Bachelor's degree or higher from a regionally accredited institution of higher education, completed a MACTE accredited training program and passed the required Praxis exams, they could be awarded a South Carolina educator certificate to teach in a public Montessori school only. This approval was key to solving the problem that Montessori principals wrestled with every hiring season: where to find qualified Montessori teachers. Now with the human resource issue resolved, CCSD could grow the additional Montessori schools that parents were demanding.

Three more schools opened in quick succession around the district. James Simons, a traditional school located in downtown Charleston, began to transition to Montessori in 2012. Then two more traditional elementary schools transitioned to Montessori: Murray-LaSaine on James Island in 2013, followed by Edith L. Frierson on Wadmalaw Island in 2018.

Today the Charleston County School District has a little more than 2,000 students enrolled in five district Montessori schools and one charter. Five of the six schools span 3K-8th grade and the newest Montessori school, Edith L. Frierson, will also be 3K-8th grade when its transition to Montessori is complete.

So, what does the future hold for public Montessori in the Charleston County School District? To be completely honest, this has been a tough year to be thinking about the future when there were so many challenges in the present to address. However, despite the challenges of teaching in the midst of a pandemic, the Charleston County School District administration has done an admirable job of preserving the uniqueness of the Montessori classroom environments while keeping the safety of its students and staff at the forefront. Yes, the classrooms have a different look and feel with plexiglass dividers, masks and social distancing. Circle time just isn't the same when your students are spread out all over the classroom. But Montessori teachers have done what they always do—adjust, and meet the needs of their students.

As we look forward to a post-pandemic world and Montessori teachers look forward to returning to some normalcy in their classrooms, there will undoubtedly be even more opportunities for public Montessori education within the Charleston County School District. The county is seeing an unprecedented surge in population, which might have something to do with our beautiful weather, gorgeous beaches and fascinating city. With this new surge, there will certainly continue to be a demand for public Montessori education and the district will respond and expand its public Montessori offerings as needed.

In 2023, Malcom C. Hursey Montessori School will move into a brand-new building and will increase its enrollment from 400 to 600 students, becoming the largest Montessori school in the district. There has been talk for some time among Montessori parents about asking the district for a public Montessori high school option. Although that option is just in the visioning stage, it is clear that the Charleston County School District is committed to championing and growing high quality authentic Montessori programs.

The future is bright and hopeful for public Montessori in CCSD which is excellent because—"Within the child lies the fate of the future."

Rachel Young, M.Ed., is the Montessori Lead Consultant for Charleston County School District.

What does a public Montessori school look like?

New public Montessori landscape report

Barriers to access remain—further study needed

BY **DAVID AYER**

A new policy report from social research giant Child Trends (*Understanding Equitable Access to Public Montessori Pre-K: A Case Study of Montessori Recruitment and Enrollment Practices*, available at ChildTrends.org) reviews the public Montessori early childhood education landscape and details how recruitment, enrollment, and location factors may limit equitable access.

The report is an outcome of the Brady Education Fund's ongoing $3M research initiative, covered by *MontessoriPublic* in several articles, including *Montessori equity research pivots to access* in March, 2020 (online). The initiative, originally intended to fund a substantial research project into the effectiveness of Montessori education across racial, cultural, and family income demographics, revised its goals when research teams found that when research teams found that the small pool of students in high-quality, true lottery Montessori schools wasn't big enough to provide a racially diverse sample.

Instead, the project was split into three efforts, one of which was a grant to Child Trends to investigate the extent to which access to public Pre-K Montessori programs is equitable. This report is the result of that investigation.

The study aimed to examine *equitable access* to early childhood Montessori programs, as defined by the Office for Planning, Research, and Evaluation, a division of the federal department of Health and Human Services:

> *Access to early care and education means that parents, with reasonable effort and affordability, can enroll their child in an arrangement that supports the child's development and meets the parents' needs*

The researchers developed three main questions. First, what does the landscape of public Montessori Pre-K look like? They undertook a landscape scan and data analysis to gather information and frame further questions.

Second, what are the programs' recruitment and enrollment practices? How do families and children find and enroll in these programs, and how does that affect equitable access? Administrators from a subset of programs were interviewed on these and other program questions.

Finally, what were families' perceptions off public Montessori Pre-K and other options? This was addressed with family interviews. However, recruitment was challenging, and only a small sample of families was interviewed.

Landscape scan

Using the NCMPS Montessori Census and data collected by the Trust for Learning as part of a 2018 Ideal Learning Landscape Study, researchers identified 288 public Montessori programs serving children four or younger. 82% of these also served three-year-olds, and most extended into elementary or even middle school. Overall, only a third of the schools were free for all children. Most were free (78%) or subsidized (5%) for kindergarten, but only a third were free for three- and four-year olds. About half (52%) used some form of lottery for enrollment, and another 23% were first-come, first-served. Only nine programs (3%) were "neighborhood schools."

The researchers dove deeply into comparisons of student demographics and their surrounding regions. However, a number of factors complicated the analysis. Communities and schools were rated "Majority" Black, Hispanic/Latine, or White if they were over 50% in a category, which makes sense mathematically but can obscure some nuances of population distribution. The authors took care to note this limitation, and pointed out that other available metrics have limitations of their own. Schools and communities where no category was a majority were labeled "Diverse".

Community demographics were taken from federal Census data, but school demographics were harder to gather and analyze. Schools don't typically break out Pre-K-specific racial data, so the study used whole school data as a proxy for the Pre-K population. Some programs (at least 22%) were "school-within-a-school" models: Montessori programs embedded in a non-Montessori school, so their populations may also have been different.

Poverty level was analyzed by comparing schools' overall Free and Reduced Price Lunch eligibility to Census data, although the authors noted recent research suggesting that this comparison may overstate poverty levels in schools.

Demographic match

Assembling these varied data sets, the researchers developed a matrix comparing schools' racial demographics to their surrounding communities. With four demographic categories (Black, Hispanic/Latine, White, or Diverse) and two measurements (the school and the community), sixteen configurations were possible: Majority-White school in a Majority-White neighborhood, Majority-White in Majority-Black, and so on. In the actual counts, four main groups emerged:

- Majority-White school in a Majority-White community — 45%
- Majority White school in a Diverse community — 9%
- Majority-Black school in a Majority-Black community — 17%
- Diverse school in a Diverse community — 6%

Overall, 73% of schools have demographics that "match" their surrounding communities. Since most (63%) of the schools are in White communities, it's possible, as the authors suggest, that this limits access to Black and Hispanic/Latine families, since fewer of them live in the neighborhoods with more schools, and the schools themselves are more likely to be Majority-White. But without knowing more detail about the neighborhoods and the schools it's a little hard to tell. For example, given that 63% of schools are in White neighborhoods but only 45% are Majority-White, that might suggest better access, not worse.

In addition, there were no Majority-White schools in Majority-Black neighborhoods, which would have been a worrying suggestion of gentrification. 10 of 23 Majority-Black schools were in Majority-White neighborhoods, but again, that can be interpreted in various ways—is it a sign of diversity and equitable access for Black students within those majority white neighborhoods, or does it suggest that Black children have to go to a different neighborhood to be in a Montessori school?

Administrative survey

Additional data was collected through a survey of school leaders. Likely due to the pandemic, the response rate was lower than had been hoped—only 37 administrators responded. The authors are transparent about the limitations this created. (Demographic data for this subset were similar to that of the complete set of 288 schools.)

Overall, 73% of schools have demographics that match their surrounding communities

From the survey results, to the extent that conclusions can be drawn, it seems that

- many programs had a bilingual teacher, but only a few had lead teachers covering the languages of all enrolled children
- most programs offered transportation, but most Majority-White programs did not
- most programs had easily accessible public transportation, except for Majority-White programs
- Majority-White programs were more likely to charge at least some tuition

The most salient results from the survey were about enrollment policies. All programs were oversubscribed, and Majority-White programs had the shortest waiting list, suggesting high demand and limited supply in Black, Hispanic/Latine, and Diverse programs. Most used "some version of a lottery," but "some version" covers a lot. Preferences for siblings and staff children were common, as they are in lottery programs generally. While these are understandable, it's easy to see how they can perpetuate inequity when Majority-White programs are in Majority-White communities. Schools can often apply preferences for income, but less readily for race, so even schools that intentionally reach for diversity and equity may have a hard time doing so.

Family perceptions

Family perceptions about early childhood education options are vitally important, but unfortunately they were extremely hard to come by this year. In the end just 13 families were recruited, including 11 Montessori families and two from non-Montessori programs. Not much can be gleaned from so small a sample size, so if there were ever a rich opportunity for further exploration, it is here.

Implications

The study faced significant limitations due largely, but not only, to the pandemic. March through May 2020 was not a great time to be contacting schools for information, and in fact the team stopped reaching out directly in mid-March. School administrators and families were likewise not readily available to take part in surveys and interviews. The low response rate to the administrative survey especially limits the conclusions which can be drawn.

In addition, data had to be drawn from a number of sources of varying quality and applicability. A 2016 record of the Montessori Census was used, (a current record of the Montessori Census may have yielded better data, and there is still need for investment and improvement in this important tool). Finally, the "demographic match" analysis had limitations the authors describe. That doesn't mean the study has nothing to offer. As the authors state:

> *Importantly, this analysis was meant to serve as a preliminary exploration of the public Montessori pre-K programs nationwide, the children they serve, and the communities in which they are located. Although findings from the landscape scan should not be interpreted conclusively, we hope that our analysis and findings may still shed light on important trends regarding who has access to public Montessori pre-K and highlight future directions for research on this topic.*

In the end, the study's findings are unavoidably characterized by conditional language such as "may" and "might". Still, if shedding light on trends and highlighting future directions for research was a goal, the study definitely succeeded.

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

A charter school turnaround in Maryland

Communication with the district, trust in the teachers

BY **KATHRYN MOSQUERA** AND **CAMILLE SMITH**

Carroll Creek Montessori Public Charter School (CCMPCS), opened in Frederick, Maryland in 2012, offers Montessori education and Spanish language instruction for 318 students in three primary classrooms, six elementary classrooms, and a middle school.

As a public charter school, CCMPCS has faced the challenge of hiring teachers who are Montessori certified as well as licensed to teach in the state of Maryland. While teachers without Montessori certification have three years to begin their Montessori teacher training, most begin sooner. Regardless of training status, teachers are still responsible for providing a Montessori learning environment, as well as ensuring that each student builds the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the district and state requirements.

From probation to an example for others to follow

At charter renewal in November 2019, the Frederick County Board of Education (at the recommendation of the FCPS superintendent) placed the school on probation because of low student scores on the state's standardized math tests. While 52.7 percent of CCMPCS students met the standard of proficiency in English Language Arts (ELA), only 19.8 percent of elementary students met the standard for math. When compared with traditional public elementary schools in the county, the Carroll Creek students fell 30 percentage points below in math performance. The superintendent also expressed concern that existing support systems in the school for students needing additional help, such as math intervention, weren't strong enough.

The school board asked CCMPCS to return in a year with three things: a clear explanation of how the school supports students who do not meet grade level performance standards, assessments that measure student progress towards standards throughout the year, and a clear explanation of how teachers document student growth within the Montessori curriculum as well as the state standards.

One year later, CCMPCS returned to the school board some answers, and with data demonstrating higher student achievement on the district and state assessments. Based on scores from the previous school year, more than 70% of students in third, fourth and fifth grade were now meeting district benchmarks. Middle school scores showed even greater improvement, with more than 75% of students meeting district benchmarks. Middle school students outperformed some FCPS schools with similar population sizes, and the county average as a whole.

The Board members were impressed and delighted. One commented, "There's a wonder in education that kind of fades from elementary to middle … but I think Montessori kind of keeps that wonder going through middle school, and I applaud you in that ... I think it's something we need to look into and bring into our middle schools." The superintendent echoed the sentiment, encouraging other schools in the district to collaborate with CCMPCS to learn more about the Montessori method.

How did CCMPCS turn around their probation status so quickly?

Communication and collaboration with the school district proved to be key factors in meeting the school board's goals for CCMPCS, as well as increasing the understanding of Montessori methodology among district personnel and school board members. Through a series of meetings with district and school staff, the district was able to refine and convey their expectations for student achievement, and CCMPCS was able to take these expectations and apply Montessori methodology in meeting them.

To start, the school's principal, the Montessori teacher specialist, and the chair of the school's parent board met with district representatives multiple times with the goal of finding an assessment that could be used by CCMPCS throughout the school year to determine students' progress towards meeting grade level standards. Students at traditional schools take district benchmark assessments aligned to the district-paced curriculum. The working group determined that the district's benchmarks would not serve CCMPCS students well due to the individualized instruction provided in the Montessori classroom. As a result of multiple meetings, the NWEA MAP assessment was identified as a measure that could be used to assess Montessori students' progress on the state standards, while not requiring CCMPCS to follow the district's suggested instruction and uniform pacing guide.

Taking a close look at the Montessori materials

District staff walked away with a clearer understanding of Montessori

Next, the district's intervention specialists visited the school and met with key staff to determine the most effective way to structure extra student support. During these meetings, it was determined that CCMPCS was already providing the appropriate support. What was needed instead was documentation of the support that was consistent with other schools in the district.

An added benefit of the meetings with district personnel was the opportunity for district representatives to learn more about Montessori. CCMPCS staff provided the district with a clear explanation of the Montessori method, its structure, and its tested ability to meet the child's needs for optimal development. The district staff who visited also had the opportunity to tour the school, take a close look at the Montessori materials, and see Montessori environments in full swing. Each person walked away with a clearer understanding of the Montessori method.

Alongside the dedicated work with the district, Principal Marilyn Horan had confidence in the school's teachers. The culture at CCMPCS is one where the teachers feel trusted to implement the Montessori method with fidelity while ensuring their students reach state performance standards. However, Mrs. Horan attributed the low scores, in part, to having to hire three new upper elementary teachers in 2018. One teacher came to the school with a rich Montessori teaching background in a private school, one had completed most of her lower elementary training and had taught a year in a private school, and one was a first-time classroom teacher.

Mrs. Horan had faith in them. They met weekly, collaborated in planning, and participated in lesson studies. The Montessori teacher specialist worked

Putting together the pieces of successful Montessori

with the new teachers regularly, as well, offering support, mentoring and modeling. Over time, as each grew accustomed to teaching at CCMPS, scores rose. They did not teach traditionally, but continued to use Montessori practices and materials, and provided extra support and intervention where needed. They did their best to reach every child and to create Montessori environments where students could thrive, and it paid off. Mrs. Horan chalks up the subsequent improvement to teacher growth: "I would have expected scores to not be as good as we would have liked, but guess what? The next year they weren't brand new anymore and look what happened to the scores—they went up significantly….[the teachers] dug in and they learned so much."

Schoolwide, the entire faculty worked on strengthening math instruction through middle school. An ad-hoc group began meeting after school to look at the alignment of the Montessori math curriculum with state standards, and to identify and share new resources across all levels.

Next steps

While CCMPCS has begun to communicate with others in FCPS about the benefits of Montessori, and has turned around student achievement in the district's eyes, there is still work to do.

There's a wonder in education that kind of fades … but I think Montessori keeps that going through middle school

In order to have a more coherent curriculum and consistent documentation across grade levels, CCMPCS will invest in the Montessori Compass digital record keeping program next year. Using this tool, teachers will be able to record students' progress towards state standards alongside their progress in the Montessori curriculum. CCMPCS will also begin implementing the NWEA MAP Assessment. This tool, used by Montessori schools across the country, will allow the school to communicate student progress with data that align to the district's standards.

With its charter renewed through 2025, CCMPCS will continue in its mission to instill a life-long love of learning in its students by providing an optimum Montessori learning environment, accessible to all students in the county, in which they can grow to become independent, confident, creative and caring members of the community and the larger world. And, the school will continue to educate the district's superintendent and board, as well as other educators in the county, about the practices and benefits of Montessori.

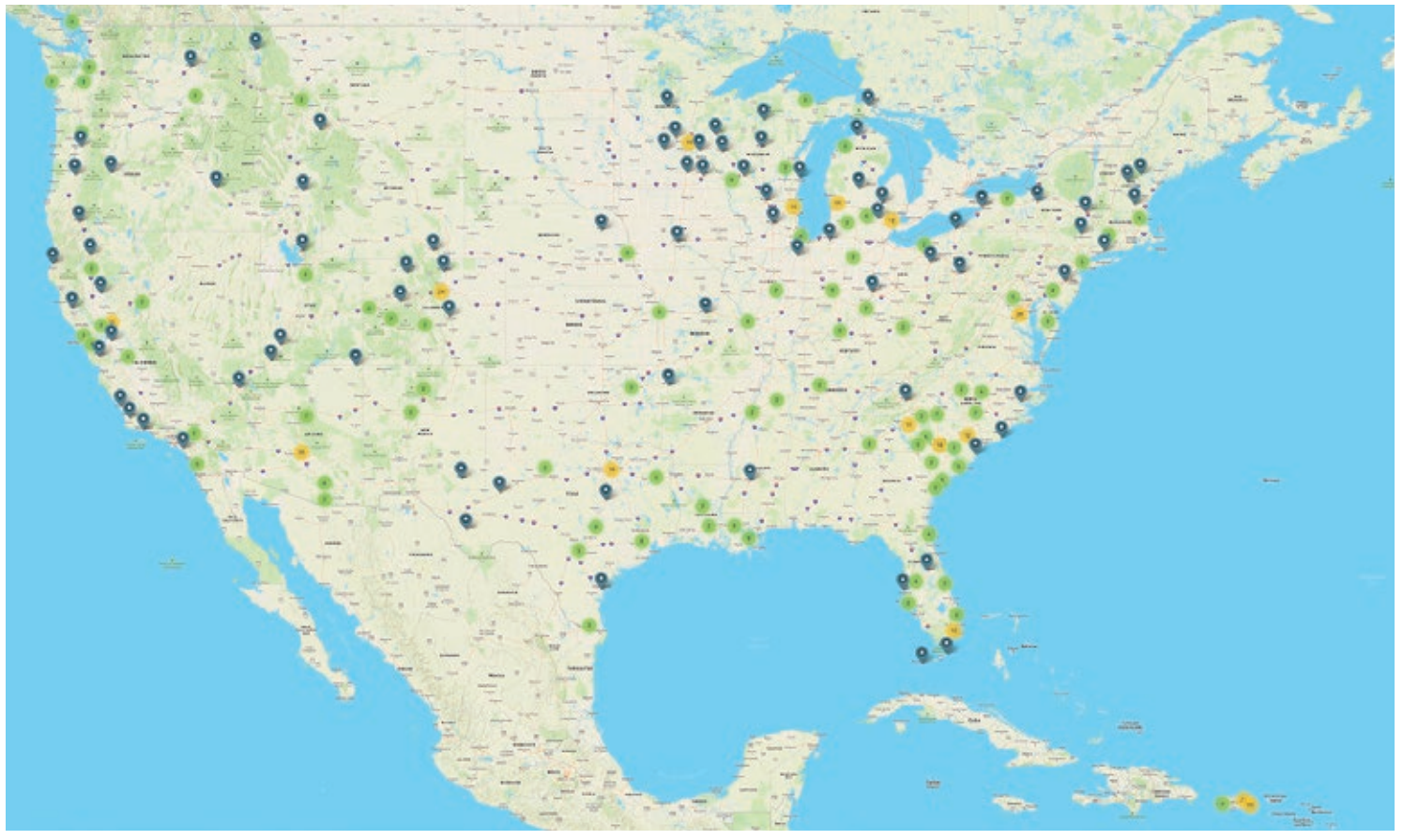
Kathryn Mosquera is the Montessori Teacher Specialist at Carroll Creek Montessori Public Charter School.

Camille Smith teaches Upper Elementary at the school.

New Schools and the Montessori Census

At least four new schools this year and more to come

BY **DAVID AYER**



The map keeps getting bigger every year

2020-2021 probably wasn't the best year to launch a new Montessori school, yet at least four new programs opened their doors this year. As of this spring, the Montessori Census lists 559 public Montessori schools in the U.S., up from 500 just a few years ago.

Five new programs in 2020:

The first of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' Day 1 Academies Fund's network of tuition-free Montessori-inspired preschools, **Bezos Academy—Des Moines**, opened in Des Moines, Washington.

The **Logan Memorial Education Complex** in San Diego, planned ultimately to be a "TK-12" program, opened its doors in the teeth of the pandemic.

In Decatur, Illinois, the **Montessori Academy For Peace** has combined students from the Garfield and Enterprise schools in a single building serving 734 students from age three through 8th grade. This kind of consolidation shows the perils of just counting schools: the count went down one, but the number of children reached and the quality of their experience may well have gone up.

Rodriguez Montessori Elementary in San Antonio, Texas, a bilingual Spanish-English program, opened with children from three years old through third grade, with plans to expand a grade per year through fifth grade. San Antonio is home to another public Montessori school, Steele Montessori Academy, which has one of the longest wait lists in the district.

Sussex Montessori School is a new charter in rural southern Delaware serving 260 children through third grade with plans to expand to 465 over the next three years.

At least eight more schools are slated to open in 2021:

Three more **Bezos Academy** schools are set to open in Washington in Federal Way, Pacific Beach, and Tacoma.

In Norwalk, Connecticut, **Brookside Elementary** will offer a children's house program.

In Cleveland, Ohio, **Stonebrook Montessori** (a charter) is merging with district school Michael R. White to form the East Side Montessori campus in the district's Montessori portfolio.

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, the district is following up on the success of 2017's Emerson Elementary, now overflowing its waiting list, with a new school at **Grissom Elementary**, starting with three-year-olds through 1st grade and growing a grade per year.

Mi Escuela Montessori, a charter school in Lakeland, Florida, will open as a full immersion bilingual Montessori school serving kindergarten through 8th grade with a sliding scale tuition for three- and four-year-olds.

Montecito Community School is a new charter in Phoenix, Arizona, with a similar tuition-free/tuition-subsidy model.

Montessori Elementary at Highland Park is a new charter in Chattanooga, Tennessee, beginning with children from three years old through second grade, ultimately going through fifth grade.

Oak Hill Montessori Community School in Shoreview, Minnesota, is a long-time private school converting into a public charter.

Pullman Community Montessori will be the first Montessori charter school in charter-averse Washington state, serving children from kindergarten through fifth grade at launch.

The Montessori Census

Did we miss a school you know about? Is your school listed correctly in the Census—www.montessoricensus.org? Let us know! The Census was launched in 2012 with support from across the Montessori ecosystem, including schools, organizations, and funders. Today it lists 559 programs serving an estimated 150,000-200,000 children. Researchers, journalists, students, families, and regular folks use the Census site thousands of times a month to learn more about public Montessori and to find public and private Montessori schools.

We need your story!

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? For the next issue, we're asking contributors to take a bold look at **early childhood education**.

- **Kindergarten Year:** How can you do Primary if funding starts at 5?
- **Head Start? Early Start?** How can we get more Montessori involved?
- **Equity impact:** How do lotteries, fees, and geography affect access?


Mosquera and Smith: Maryland Young: South Carolina Child Trends: Access to ECE

MontessoriPublic.org

Behavior support informed by Peace Literacy

A new approach to PBIS focuses on peace

Montessori: More culturally responsive

A new study compares Montessori to "no excuses"

How long should it be? 1,100-1,200 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 Fall issue is **August 31 2021**, 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

The public calendar

October 15–17	**Montessori Adolescent Practitioners Symposium** *HYBRID*
October 23	**South Carolina Montessori Alliance** *ONLINE*
November 4–7	**Montessori Foundation Annual Conference** *ONLINE*
November 5	**New Jersey Montessori Association** *ONLINE*

2022

January 15	**University of Wisconsin Conference** EMBRACING CHANGE AND CREATIVITY IN MONTESSORI LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS *UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-LACROSSE*
February 18–20	**Montessori Educational Programs International** MOVING MONTESSORI FORWARD *KIAWAH ISLAND GOLF RESORT—SOUTH CAROLINA*
February 18–22	**The Montessori Experience** AMI REFRESHER COURSE AND WORKSHOPS *ORLANDO, FLORIDA*
March 5	**Cincinnati Montessori Conference** *CINCINNATI, OHIO*
March 17–20	**The Montessori Event** AMS ANNUAL CONFERENCE *NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE*

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

Deadline for the next issue: **September 13, 2021.**
Be sure to include the date, organization, event title, city and state
Email to: editor@montessoripublic.org