

Montessori in the mainstream

**Not only
accepted,
but expected**



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NCMPS's 2023 annual report is titled Mainstreaming Montessori. NCMPS is working for Montessori to be not only an accepted but an expected public option for every family and community.

Over the summer two meta-analyses were published showing the positive impact of a Montessori education: One from the highly influential Campbell Systematic Reviews, and the other in a well-respected mainstream journal, *Contemporary Educational Psychology*.

Last year, globally recognized Bloomsbury publishing house put out the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education*, featuring in-depth analysis from a wide spectrum of Montessori voices, including former Executive Director of AMS and NCMPS Board member Richard Ungerer and NCMPS Director of Research and Professional Learning Katie Brown.

When I began my doctoral studies on public Montessori in 2006, there was so little research on Montessori that I was unable to include a Montessori literature review. Two decades later, we have research on Montessori and academic outcomes, adult well-being, enjoyment of school, executive function, racial differences, socio-economic differences, creativity, and more.

Publication by publication, school by school, media outlet by media outlet, Montessori is moving off of the periphery and into the mainstream.

We are succeeding. Should we be celebrating?

In 2008, I attended the research session at the American Montessori Society (AMS) conference in Washington, DC. I was a new scholar in the midst of conducting research on public Montessori schools. A comment was made that, though I don't remember who made it, has stuck with me. The speaker put forward the supposition that Montessori has survived as long as it has and as intact as it has because it has flown under the radar, making it immune from and impervious to outside influences that might corrupt or undermine it.

I took note. I was committed to children and families in public settings having access to Montessori but did not want to contribute to Montessori's downfall. I knew that public expansion would mean public scrutiny, and I was seeing in my research how the external pressures manifested in the classroom. Private dollars buy private accountability. Public dollars bring public accountability. (This dynamic may be shifting as funding streams, delivery systems, and the line between private and public blurs, but that is grist for a different reflection.)

Yet, despite the trepidation I felt 15 years ago in Washington, DC, I am still here, working with public systems that want to better serve students through Montessori. What have I seen?

There is a role for all of the players in the U.S. Montessori ecosystem. We didn't plan it out ahead of time; we happened our way into it. Independent schools serve thousands of children and families and show what can be done in the absence of constraints. The folk working in independent schools are peers who share professional development, school visits, materials,

etc. They are one piece of the puzzle in demonstrating that Montessori is a good thing – it is such a good thing that families will pay for it, often at great financial sacrifice. This is an important step in increasing access – If Montessori is good for those with financial means, no one who checks their biases can ethically and honestly say Montessori wouldn't be good for all children.

More Montessori creates more Montessori. Families want what is best for their children. As more hear, see, and learn about Montessori, whether through public or private schools, more will want it in both public and private schools.

Montessori isn't precious, it is robust. Its fundamental view of childhood can accommodate and tolerate a lot of imposition, compromise, and less-than-ideal structures and practices and still offer so much more and better than other models to children and families. Is ideal ideal? As defined by core principles and with an eye for equity and honesty, Yes. Does NCMPS work with schools to keep moving ever closer to this ideal? Yes. Do we stop pursuing this approach for all children, even in light of there being some schools that now, and perhaps always, struggle to reach full implementation? No.

So, here I am. With you. Until Montessori is not only accepted but expected in every district, neighborhood, and authorizer's portfolio and every families' choices.

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