

The Montessori Census speaks

Turning data into information

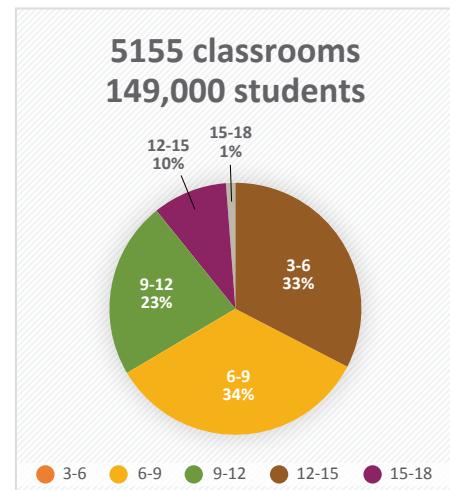
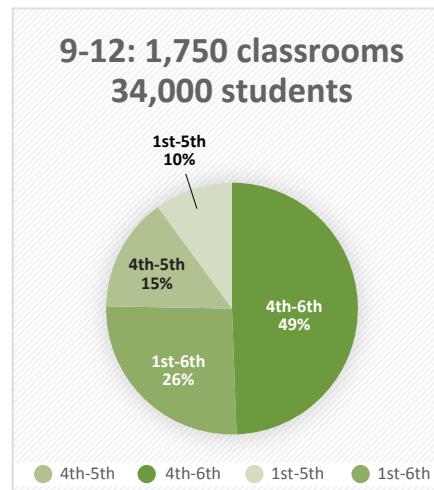
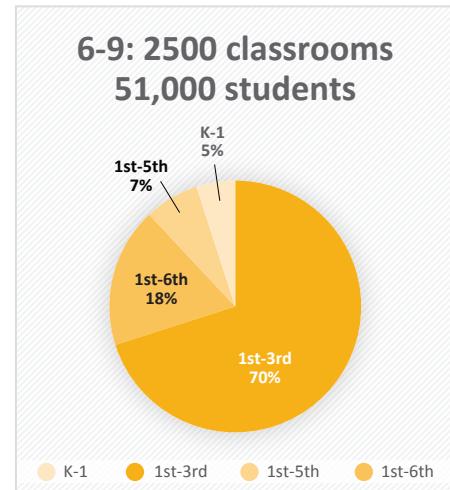
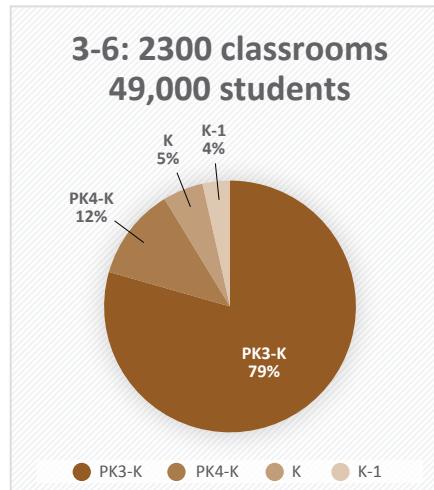
BY NCMPS STAFF

The Montessori Census is picking up speed and starting to put out some very interesting data—but we need every public Montessori school do join in. (If your school hasn't claimed and updated, get in touch with us at info@montessoricensus.org and we'll get you set up.)

How many public Montessori schools are there? We've had an answer for a while now: the number “about 500” has bounced up and down a little but stayed about the same since we started seriously counting seven years ago. But how good is that number? And what do those schools look like? There's so much more we're just starting to find out.

NCMPS created the Census in 2012, with support from the Trust for Learning and the cooperation of all the national Montessori organizations. Last year, we launched a major refresh and relaunch, to clean up the data we had on file from years back, and to really get into the details. How many children? How many classrooms? True three-to-six or “kindergarten” only? Choice, lottery, magnet, neighborhood, or something else? This is the kind of data that supports research and advocacy, as well as raising the visibility of individual schools and the movement as a whole. Last year, Dr. Angeline Lillard used the Census to recruit schools with a specific profile for the first-ever federally funded study of Montessori, which is underway now.

We ask schools to manage their own profiles, so we can have the most up-to-date, firsthand information, and they have responded—since April, we've



gone from 176 public schools claiming their profiles to over 200. Private schools, which add to our picture of the Montessori model, have joined in as well, going from 612 to 790. And we've weeded out schools that were closed or wrongly listed, so the actual growth is more than those numbers suggest.

Of those 200 claimed public schools, about 100 have taken the extra step of filling in the very latest fields, where we drill down into grade levels and class sizes, and we're ready to share some preliminary data. It's preliminary because this is just the 100 schools most invested in responding, so no doubt

there's some selection bias there, but it starts to suggest the outlines of the true shape. Below, we'll take a look at what the numbers would be if the other 400 schools are like these.

The first thing is the number of children: about 35,000. Bear in mind that these are “early returns”; as more schools report in we can expect that number to go up. Still, we know some interesting things about even this small sample.

About 1/3 of these children are in Primary, or three-to-six programs.

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How many children? How many classrooms? True three-to-six or “kindergarten” only? Lottery, magnet, neighborhood, or something else?

Another third are in six-to-nine, or 1st through 3rd grade. Then another quarter are in nine-to-twelve, and the remaining tenth in middle or high school. So when we think of children in public Montessori (at least for these schools), about a third are in kindergarten or lower, while more than half are in grade school. Another way to look at it is this: two-thirds of the children are nine or younger, which helps explain the focus on reading and math scores. Along with everything else that happens in Montessori for young children, they are acquiring essential basic literacy and numeracy, and Montessori needs to fully implement its remarkable strengths in these areas.

What about those three-to-six-year-olds? With the scarcity of funding for three- and four-year-olds, one might expect that “kindergarten only” Primaries might dominate, but (at least for this sample) that wasn’t so. Nearly 80% of children six and under are in “PK3-K” classrooms, as reported by these Census users. (The sample skews more heavily to charter schools than the whole set—55% versus 40%—which may play a role in this surprising data.)

The Big Picture

What about the other 400 schools? We have some limited data, and we can make a rough extrapolation. If the

other schools were like the first 100 (which we already know they’re not, as stated above), the numbers would look like the charts at right.

How does that compare with the rest of the education world? As it happens, EdWeek recently posted a data mine of U.S. Education statistics which are essential for getting a sense of scale.

There are about 90,000 public schools in the US, so if we have about 500, that comes to about 0.5%. (You can correct for 3-6 and middle/high school, but it stays about the same.) Doubling the number of Montessori schools in five years would take us to ...10%. It puts things in perspective. Our share of children is even smaller: 150,000 out of 57 million, or 0.26%.

All that might be a little dispiriting. How will we ever achieve the growth we need in order to reach all the children who need us?

But we look at it a little differently. “Aller anfang ist schwer” is a German proverb typically translated as “Everything is difficult in the beginning.” And at the beginning is where we are, and the task before us is monumental. But *schwer* can also be read as “heavy”, “weighty”, “serious”, or “important”, and this resonates with Montessori’s important work with young children. Our work supporting healthy development in young people is so important

for their lifelong trajectory—that’s why we insist so strongly on including the “three” in “three to six”. Or including the family in “birth to three,” if we can get there. When we work with the youngest children, we work at the maximum point of leverage, which is where you need to be if your strength is small and you want the greatest reach.

Another proverb, attributed by the internet to Confucius but most likely drawn from the work of another Chinese figure, Guan Zhong, reminds us: plan for 1 year, plant —ten years, plant trees—100 years, teach children. We’re on the 100 year plan.

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