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BRINGING MONTESSORI INTO THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION IN PRINT AND ONLINE • MONTESSORIPUBLIC.ORG • FALL 2019 • VOL 4 NUMBER 1

## No hidden figures: Black Montessori history

**Montessorians of African descent radiate #BlackExcellence**



BY DR. AYIZE SABATER

#BlackExcellence, indeed! A packed audience was mesmerized by the brilliance of #BlackExcellence that radiated this June at the Montessori for Social Justice (MSJ) 2019 conference, during a panel titled *Hidden Figures 2.0: Pioneering Black Montessori Educators Past and Present*. The panel was co-organized by Yale Education Studies Executive Director Dr. Mira Debs, who was inspired by the many pioneering Montessori educators of color she discovered while researching her book *Diverse Families, Desirable Schools: Public Montessori in the Era of School Choice*. She and co-organizers hoped to celebrate some of the many Black Montessori educators “hidden in plain sight”.

The MSJ panel was “2.0” because the first “Hidden Figures” panel narratives were presented at the 2019 American Montessori Society conference. Dr. Ayize Sabater, who during the first panel told his story of helping to co-found Shining Stars Montessori Academy Public Charter School in D.C. with his wife Rhonda Lucas-Sabater Wila Golden and Juanita Marsh, now served as the facilitator for the 2.0 panel. The featured Black Montessori luminaries for this panel included Jacqui Miller, founder of Stonebrook Montessori in Cleveland; Meryl Thompson, daughter of pioneering Black Montessori educator Lenore G. Briggs; Carolyn Grimstead, a former teacher trainer at the Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents (CHAMP) Teacher Education Program (TEP); and Sylvia Townsend, former Director of CHAMP TEP.

Audience members appeared captivated during this panel. Many may mistakenly think that Black folk are newcomers to the Montessori movement. However, Grimstead, a professor at Long Island University Post, presented on the trailblazing work of Roslyn D. Williams. Grimstead described research pointing to Black Montessori preschools



Sabater, Miller, Thompson, Grimstead, and Townsend

being established during the 1920s, just a few years after Dr. Maria Montessori first visited the U.S.—history hidden in plain sight.

For more evidence that Black educators had realized the value of Montessori education early on, she distributed a Chicago Defender article from November 13, 1954 by Mary McLeod Bethune which discussed how Maria

Montessori worked tirelessly for her “children’s crusade” which saw education as a tool of great “promise for children” and an instrument for reforming the world. Grimstead also asserted that many Black Montessori schools closed which could “partly [be] attributed to the racial segregation of the period,”

*continues on page 13 >*

## Surviving the storm: Reform in Puerto Rico

**A community rallied to save the schools and support democracy**



BY KATHERINE MIRANDA

You may have recently heard about weeks of massive protests in Puerto Rico that ousted governor Rosselló from his post. You may not have heard about how the public Montessori movement fits into this picture. The grass-roots, community-based movement has been advocating for social justice through transformative education reform for almost thirty years.

During the recent controversies surrounding the Rosselló administration’s austerity measures, corruption scandals, and post-María crises, the public Montessori movement has been on the front lines, mobilizing school communities to demand government transparency, citizen participation, and educational equity. In the midst of events that led to widespread unrest and forced the governor’s resignation, Montessori school communities have been fighting, and winning, to keep their schools open and intact. Their most recent achievements offer inspiration to guide our paths forward in the public implementation of Montessori pedagogy.

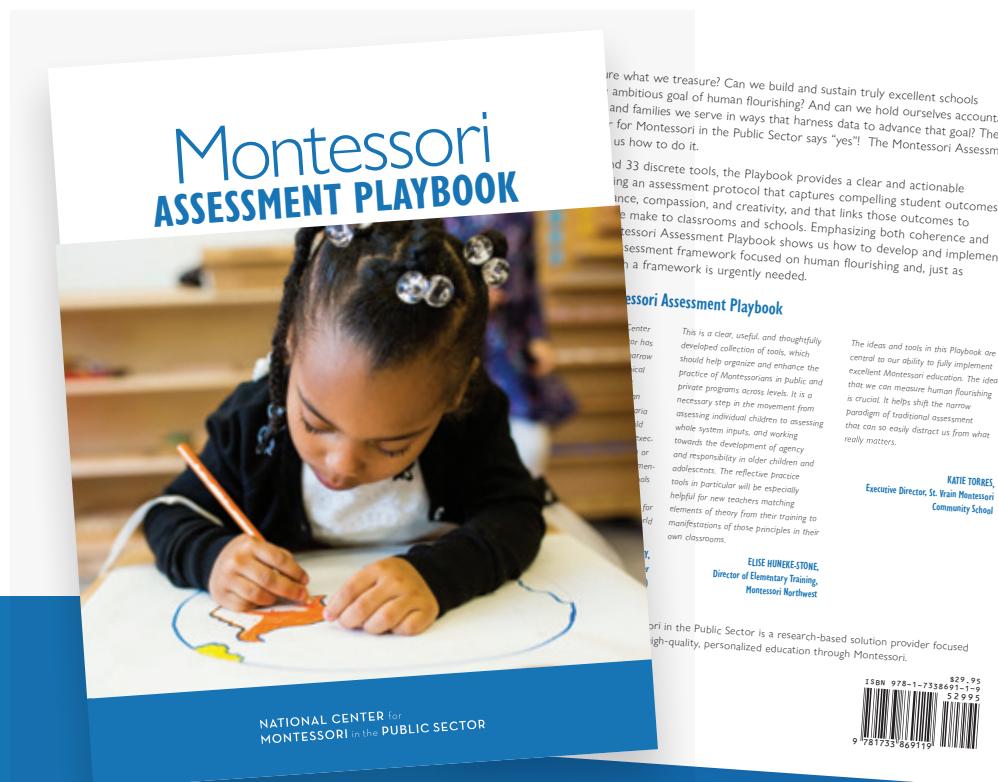
As reported in the winter 2018 issue of *MontessoriPublic*, a network of more than 40 public Montessori schools in

Puerto Rico has accomplished remarkable, community-based school transformations within the highly centralized and impoverished Puerto Rican Department of Education (PRDE). The public Montessori movement, helmed by the non-profit organization Instituto Nueva Escuela (INE), which trains Montessori guides and supports schools in transforming to Montessori methodology, is based on pillars of collective governance and active community and family participation. Ideologically, the movement is rooted in the belief that education must serve as a critical vehicle for social justice. As Ana María García Blanco, INE’s Executive Director and veteran leader of the movement explains,

*continues on page 14 >*

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# The public Montessori landscape

How many schools, where are they, and who is in them?



BY DAVID AYER

This issue of *MontessoriPublic* focuses on the growth and development of public Montessori programs in cities and regions such as Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Denver, Puerto Rico, and more.

There are two parts to this story—one part about what we know, and one about what we don't. The overall history of public Montessori in the U.S. is fairly well known and understood—even if, *Hidden Figures* style (see cover story), there are stories that deserve to be shared more widely.

Many early “second-wave” U.S. Montessorians in the 1960s were access-oriented, grounded in their Catholicism, making an effort to serve low-income families even if nearly all schools were tuition-dependent.

Desegregation orders (sometimes bitterly opposed and fought for decades) drove the growth of the first public

programs as magnet schools in the 1970s through the 1990s, when many of those orders were listed.

Charter schools, first proposed in 1971 as a school reform to reduce bureaucracy and empower innovative teachers, came to life the 1990s and a second wave of public Montessori schools rolled across the country. Districts responded with choice programs of their own, under “district charter”, “innovation”, and other headings, and public Montessori has continued to spread and expand. More than 500 public Montessori schools are in operation today.

Or are there? As readers of *MontessoriPublic* and followers of the National Center for Montessori in the

In March of 2018, NCMPS launched a Census refresh and outreach campaign. At that time, it listed 511 public schools. Today it lists 499. That doesn't look like growth! Does that really mean 13 schools closed last year, or at least that 13 more closed than opened?

Not exactly. Not even close, actually. Here's what really happened.

Over the last year and a half, we've been digging into what is or was really a public Montessori school and what wasn't—which ones were closed, or not Montessori any more, or never Montessori, or never public, or duplicates, or...some other kind of bad data. From that list of 511, we've purged 76 listings, leaving 441.

## 200,000 children attend public Montessori schools

Public Sector know, our main tool for measuring the size, distribution, and characteristics of public Montessori has been the Montessori Census, launched in 2013 and updated and improved every year since. It's far from a perfect collection of data, but it has a lot of value, and thanks to the participation of individual schools, it's getting better and better.

But does that mean there were only 441 in 2018? No! Thanks to schools which have joined the Census, we've added 58 listings that were either new schools (six) or should have been there in the first place. And of course every year schools close. So our best guess

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## In this issue: the public Montessori story

This issue of *MontessoriPublic* looks back on the history of public Montessori in the U.S.—how and why did it get started, where did it thrive and grow, and where are we now? Montessori news and developments and reports on NCMPS projects are covered as well.

**David Ayer** shares new data about public Montessori, updates us on the spread of Wildflower schools, and reports on a new program in Oregon.

**Marta Donahoe, Julie Kugler-Ackley, and Mary Lisa Vertuca** tell the story of public Montessori in Cincinnati, home of the first public Montessori school.

**Phillip Dosmann** recounts the growth of Milwaukee Public Schools' public Montessori system.

**Leslie Hooper** shares public Montessori developments in three rural west Texas towns.

**Katy Mattis** has gathered the history of public

Montessori in Denver and around Colorado.

**Katherine Miranda** has an update on the intersection of politics and public Montessori in Puerto Rico.

**Ayize Sabater** shares the “hidden in plain sight” stories of pioneering Black Montessorians.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE OF MONTESSORIPUBLIC:

**Tamika Cross** gives us an update from the Montessori for Social Justice Conference this summer.

**Christy Curton and Jacey Tramutt** share their experiences using Non-Violent Communication (NVC) in the lower elementary.

**Trisha Willingham** reports on the Hellbrügge Foundation's Inclusive Education Course held this summer in Milwaukee.



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Your deadline is **Dec 30, 2019**. More guidelines on page 23.

# Public Montessori in the Centennial state

## From Head Start to high school over 51 years



BY KATY MATTIS

Public Montessori started in Colorado in 1968 at the Southern Ute Montessori Head Start in Ignacio which continues to serve children from birth to age 5. Unfortunately, the future of that program is now in doubt, as the Southern Ute tribe is reconsidering its support for the Head Start implementer. Still, 51 years later, Colorado is home to 29 public Montessori programs ranging from Infancy Head Start programs through high school.

While Southern Ute Montessori Head Start is Colorado's first public program, the public Montessori movement in Colorado gained traction 18 years later with the opening of Mitchell Montessori in Denver Public Schools (DPS).

### Mitchell Montessori

The program began in 1986 during a nationally significant time for the Public Montessori movement. From 1975 to 1989, public magnet Montessori schools were opening across the country in response to a shifting focus on desegregation. In 1985, the U.S. District Court found Mitchell Elementary, a struggling, poorly resourced school in a low-income, high crime, mostly Hispanic neighborhood of Northeast Denver, out of compliance with a federal desegregation order, and ordered DPS to integrate the school. Dr. Martha Urioste, whose roles with DPS had included teacher, guidance counselor, and

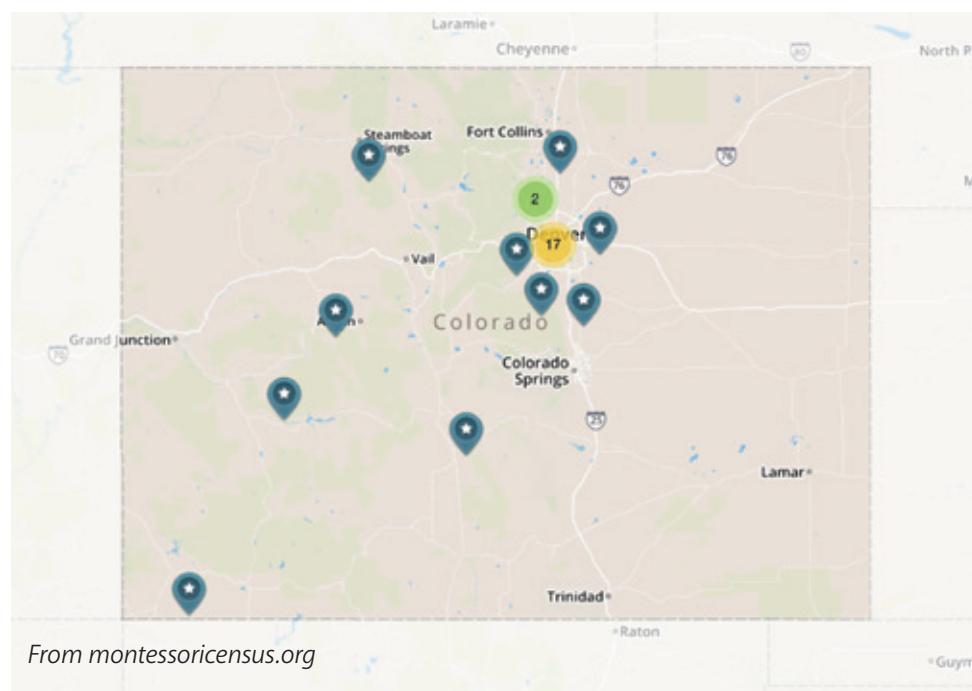
assistant principal, had been Principal of Mitchell Elementary for just one year. At the time, Dr. Urioste was not yet familiar with Montessori but was encouraged by a friend to attend a Montessori lecture. She writes that she thought to herself, "If this Montessori lesson could give me such an experience in 20 minutes, what could it do for small Hispanic children in a Montessori classroom?" Dr. Urioste convinced DPS that a Montessori program at Mitchell would attract families from across the city, drawing white families and integrating the school.

### Family Star

In 1991, Dr. Urioste was also pivotal in the opening of Family Star Montessori, a Head Start program. Family Star opened that year across the street from Mitchell Montessori in what had been a vacant rental unit turned drug house. Family Star sent five women from the neighborhood to take Assistants to Infancy training and the program was launched. In 1995, the program was one of just 17 nationally chosen to participate in Early Head Start. A second location was opened in 1997, and Primary was added in 2001. A second Primary was added in 2005, and the program now serves over 300 children and their families from birth to age five.

### Mitchell moves to Denison

The Montessori program at Mitchell was a resounding success, attracting, along with its existing families, white families from across town as well as middle-class black and Hispanic families from the neighborhood, with tuition-free preschool for three-year-olds and door-to-door bussing. By 1995, Mitchell's student body was 22 percent black, 38 percent white and 38 percent Hispanic, and the test scores (Iowa Test of Basic Skills) were the highest



in Denver Public Schools. With integration seemingly achieved, the court order was lifted, DPS decided to return to neighborhood schools across the city, and in 1997 the Montessori program at Mitchell was moved to Denison Elementary School in more affluent Southwest Denver.

This decision was controversial at the time and remains contentious. On the one hand, with bussing coming to an end, neighborhood children needed spaces in the school which were at the time being taken up with children from elsewhere, and neighborhood support for the school had never been as strong, or at least as vocal, as the support from the white and more affluent families. On the other hand, the move meant that the innovative Montessori model was being withdrawn from the local community. Mitchell struggled, declined, and closed in 2008.

Martha Urioste moved to Denison Montessori, retired from the school in 2003, and remains a tireless advocate for Montessori in the public sector.

Denison continues to thrive as a public Montessori programs in DPS. Over the two decades since the move, six more DPS programs opened. One, Gilpin Montessori School, closed in 2017 due to low enrollment and declining test scores, but the rest remain in operation.

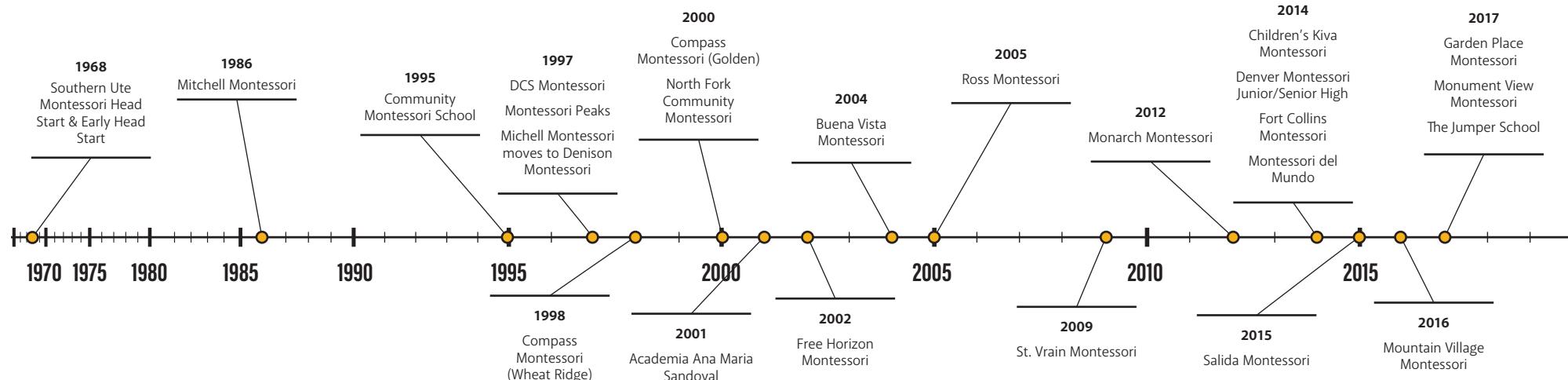
### Charter schools

In 1993, the Colorado Charter School Act passed, and over the next two decades, charter Montessori schools began to spread in the state. In 1997, Montessori Peaks Academy in Littleton and Douglas County Montessori Charter School in Castle Pines opened. There are now 16 Montessori charter schools in Colorado.

Colorado saw its first charter Montessori adolescent program at Compass Montessori School in Golden in 2000. (There had been an earlier adolescent program in DPS at Hamilton Middle School, but it had closed.)

In 2014, DPS opened another adolescent program at Denver Montessori Junior/Senior High. Together, Compass Montessori and DMHS operate a

## Public Montessori in Colorado: a timeline



coffeeshop, Pinwheel Coffee, as an expression of Montessori adolescent pedagogy's Occupations and Micro-Economy concepts—real, meaningful work that engages young adults in economic production and exchange. The students of Pinwheel describe their coffeeshop like this: “Pinwheel is a community that supports local businesses and provide high quality coffee to our community, while giving adolescents unique business experience and opportunities! We use the coffee shop as an extension of our school. We are learning math by understanding the accounting. The marketing is an exercise for our English and creative writing, and of course, we are getting real world on-the-job training learning to pour a perfect shot. As far as we know, this program is unique to Montessori schools.”

Human Services has agreed to grant all Montessori schools validated by CMA an Administrative Materials Waiver, which allows them to safely incorporate real-world materials which may include glass, small objects and even sharp tools such as sewing needles in early childhood classrooms.

### Great Work Inc (GWI)

Great Work is a non-profit “committed to supporting the quality, stability and expansion of Montessori education through high fidelity teacher training and professional development, innovative programming with an emphasis on adolescent years, and the cultivation of tools, curriculum and resources that will better support educators and education institutions to serve the needs of students.” GWI helped develop Pinwheel

## With integration seemingly achieved, the court order was lifted, and the Montessori program moved

Today, Colorado is home to 29 public Montessori schools—16 charters and 13 operated by school districts. In addition, a number of Montessori organizations provide Montessori training and rich professional development and parent education opportunities.

### National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector Regional Hub

In 2018, the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS) launched its Denver Regional Hub. Through this hub, NCMPS's integrated, practice-based, and school-wide approaches to continuous improvement in public Montessori schools has been brought to Colorado. NCMPS supports schools in their work towards full implementation with coordinated services that blend targeted professional development with individual and collective reflection, problem-solving, and community building.

### Colorado Montessori Association (CMA)

CMA was founded in 2012 by a group of educators who saw the need to ensure a robust and effective voice in Colorado for Montessori pedagogy. CMA offers professional development opportunities as well as state level advocacy for Montessori education. Through their advocacy, the Colorado Department of

Coffee, and offers MAPS (Montessori Adolescent Practitioners Symposium), Adolescent Intro Courses, Math Institute, and Adolescent Orientations. Great Work Inc will also be offering an AMI Primary training starting this Fall.

### Montessori Education Center of the Rockies (MECR)

Founded in 1978, MECR is an AMS Montessori teacher training program for Infancy, Primary and Elementary. MECR also provides a variety of professional learning opportunities throughout the school year.

### The Montessori Institute (TMI)

Founded in 1993, The Montessori Institute offers AMI Assistants to Infancy training. TMI also offers a variety of professional learning and parent education opportunities throughout the school year.

### Montessori Casa International (MCI)

Founded in 2004, MCI offers MACTE accredited Primary Training. MCI also provides a series of seminars and workshops throughout the year.

*Katy Mattis is the Director of Tools and Assets for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, and former Principal at Denison Montessori.*

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# Public Montessori in Milwaukee

## A district-wide system dating back to the 1970s



BY PHILLIP DOSMANN WITH NCMPS STAFF

There has been Montessori in Milwaukee since at least 1961, when AMI trainer Hildegard Solzbacher helped found Milwaukee Montessori School. Solzbacher taught, administered, and trained teachers in Milwaukee, and publicly advocated for Montessori, notably through a series of public lectures at Marquette University. In 1973, she worked with Milwaukee Public Schools Early Childhood Specialist Grace Iacolucci to launch four Montessori pre-kindergarten programs, the first public Montessori schools in Wisconsin and among the first in the nation.

## Magnet schools

In the mid 1970s, in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, desegregation orders, bussing, and “white flight”, a new idea for voluntary integrating schools arose: “magnet schools,” which would draw more affluent white families back to impoverished, blacker inner-city schools with new programs and additional resources. In 1976, under a court-ordered desegregation plan, Milwaukee Public Schools looked to magnet schools. The existing MPS Montessori preschools provided a ready supply of interested families from all over the city. The preschools were consolidated and MacDowell Montessori School was established in 1978, making it the first in the country to publicly fund Montessori for four-year-olds. Funding for three-year-olds was added in 1981. Solzbacher continued to guide and support the school, and by 1982 MacDowell was a well-established Montessori program attracting trained Montessori teachers from not only Milwaukee, but across the US.

As parents demanded additional Montessori seats for their children, Greenfield Montessori was launched in 1983, serving children from three years old through fifth grade. Greenfield quickly became successful, again creating long wait lists for entry ages three

and four, and the program expanded to middle school in 1995.

## 1990s: Neighborhood schools and charters

MacDowell and Greenfield continued to provide successful Montessori education for the remainder of the 1980s and early 90s, through fifth grade at both sites, eventually adding sixth through eighth grade in these and all future programs. During this time no new Montessori programs were created in MPS. But in 1994, newly elected school board members saw the merits of Montessori education in MPS and the Neighborhood Schools Initiative (NSI). The NSI took into account the need for Montessori schools and began to look at the need to locate the programs strategically in the city.

In 1996, Phil Dosmann, a longtime advocate of Milwaukee public Montessori and Montessori trained teacher and curriculum coordinator at MacDowell, worked with the school board and a neighborhood association to launch Craig Montessori, and was named principal of the school. Craig opened with 200 three- and four-year olds, and expanded to 8th grade by 2004. The school now serves more than 500 students from three years old through 8th grade.

Craig was the first MPS Montessori school to achieve AMI Recognition, and MacDowell also achieved AMI recognition around this time. Dosmann advocated for Montessori trained administrators in two programs he was administering. Mr. Dosmann currently is semi-retired from his role as the executive director of the Wisconsin Montessori Association (WMA) and worked for MPS as a principal coach and Montessori teacher recruiter for the Montessori programs.

Also in 1996, Highland Community School, founded as a private school in 1968, became Milwaukee’s first charter school. A second school, Downtown Montessori Academy, founded as a private school in 1976, converted to a charter in 1998. Highland, an MPS non-instrumentality charter, now serves nearly 400 students from three years old through 8th grade, and Downtown serves 272 over the same age range.

In 2001, also under the NSI, Maryland Avenue Montessori, serving children from three years old through 8th grade, was opened, and Greenfield Montessori moved to the former Fernwood school

and was renamed Fernwood Montessori School. Maryland now serves more than 450 students from three years old through 8th grade, and Fernwood enrolls more than 700.

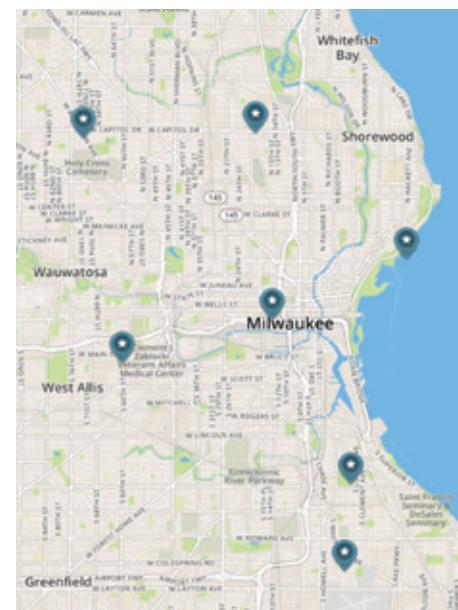
In 2006, with support from a grant for “teacher run schools” from the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation, a Montessori IB high school was launched. In 2011, the school merged with MacDowell Montessori, which now serves more than 700 children from three years old through 12th grade. Also in 2006, a small program was opened at the Kosciuszko school, serving the nearby Spanish-speaking community. The program did not thrive and was closed in 2014, but a new MPS Montessori bilingual program was launched in 2017 at Riley School on the near south side.

In 2009, MPS launched Lloyd Barbee Montessori school in a historically black and low-income area of the central city. The school is named for Lloyd Augustus Barbee, a black politician and civil rights activist whose 1965 lawsuit against Milwaukee Public Schools eventually resulted in the 1976 desegregation order which drove the development of public Montessori in the city. The school serves more than 300 children through 6th grade.

In 2012, Dosmann again played a role in Milwaukee Public Montessori, helping launch Howard Avenue Montessori school, now renamed Bayview Montessori, which has since expanded into two campuses serving more than 350 children expanding through 8th grade.

The latest public Montessori program in Milwaukee was the Riley bilingual Spanish-English program on the near south side, opening in 2017. Riley offers dual-language Montessori instruction beginning with more than 100 three- and four- year olds, and plans to extend Montessori through 8th grade.

Public Montessori in Milwaukee has been on a long, slow rise since its inception in 1976. But its growth has proceeded unevenly, responding to the social conditions of the day and often driven by individual passionate and dedicated innovators. Historically, Montessori education in MPS has expanded due to parents, teacher and board members requesting a Montessori program either in their geographical region or to respond to a specific need. All this has happened without an overarching strategic plan.



From [montessoricensus.org](http://montessoricensus.org)

But this is on the verge of changing for the 3500+ MPS Montessori students and families. In October of 2018, the MPS school board passed a resolution directing the administration to create a long-term Montessori Strategic Plan supporting the fortification of existing Montessori programs and expansion to underserved communities. Through the creation of the Montessori Advisory Council, this has been a collaborative effort, spearheaded by parent leadership a strategic plan was adopted by the MPS Board in the Spring of 2019.

MAC has developed a slate of concrete recommendations to the Board, including adoption of NCMPS Essential Elements, support for current and upcoming school leaders, expansion and financing of teacher training, whereby the district is collaborating with the Montessori Institute of Milwaukee to train current MPS teaching assistants in order to meet the ever increasing Montessori teacher needs, Montessori professional development, expansion plans, and an annual review process.

These recommendations are slowly being implemented, and a Montessori trained coordinator has already been hired to support implementation. If these steps can be taken, public Montessori in Milwaukee will continue its record of excellence and continue to bring quality, public Montessori education to even more children in the city of Milwaukee.

*Philip Dosmann is the past Executive Director of the Wisconsin Montessori Association and has served as a teacher, coach, and principal in Milwaukee Public Montessori for more than 30 years.*

# Small towns with big Montessori plans

Three west Texas towns adopt Montessori for college readiness



BY LESLIE HOOPER

Here in Texas, we have over 3000 cities and towns. Almost anywhere you go in Texas you will drive through a small town, the kind of place that if you blink, you will miss it. 20% of Texas' schools are in rural areas—2,000 in all, more than any other state. Rural schools in Texas typically serve lower-income families with very limited funds, and face all the challenges that come with that territory. Children in these areas will at times remind you of the children that Dr. Montessori told us about when she started the Children's House in Rome. This is a story about three small towns using Montessori as part of a plan to better the lives of the children they serve.

## Roscoe

Roscoe, Texas is about an hour west of Abilene, Texas, population 1,293 in 2017—down from 1,378 in 2010. A Roscoe native who returned to the area as an educational leader, Superintendent Kim Alexander has been working with the school board and the community to develop model that would allow all students to succeed and to graduate high school with a higher-level education.

In 2009, Roscoe Independent School District became Roscoe Collegiate ISD, preparing students for college, building partnerships with businesses and Texas higher education, and offering students the opportunity to earn college credit in high school. The model takes a “P-20” approach, an extension of the K-12 model which sees education as a continuum from preschool through college and graduate school. Roscoe has received funding to develop its “Collegiate Edu-Nation P-20 System Model for 21st Century School Transformation” and share it with other rural schools in Texas and across the county.

While creating this model, Dr. Alexander and his colleagues visited a PK-8 Montessori school in Houston ISD. Dr. Alexander said, “After visiting with two PK-8 Public Montessori Schools in Houston ISD, I am convinced that

Montessori just produces a smarter 8th grader, especially in numeracy and literacy, which is an area in which students struggle!”

During the back to school professional development, I was fortunate enough to meet Dr. Alexander and his co-writers Dr. Gary E. Briers and Dr. Glen C. Shinn of the Collegiate Edu-Nation P-20 System Model for 21st Century School Transformation. This document is right in line with what Montessori educators strive to achieve. One of the requirements of becoming an early adopter of the P-20 Model is to implement Montessori programs in the elementary level of the school districts. “Curiosity and self-directedness increased when students experienced Montessori Methods.”

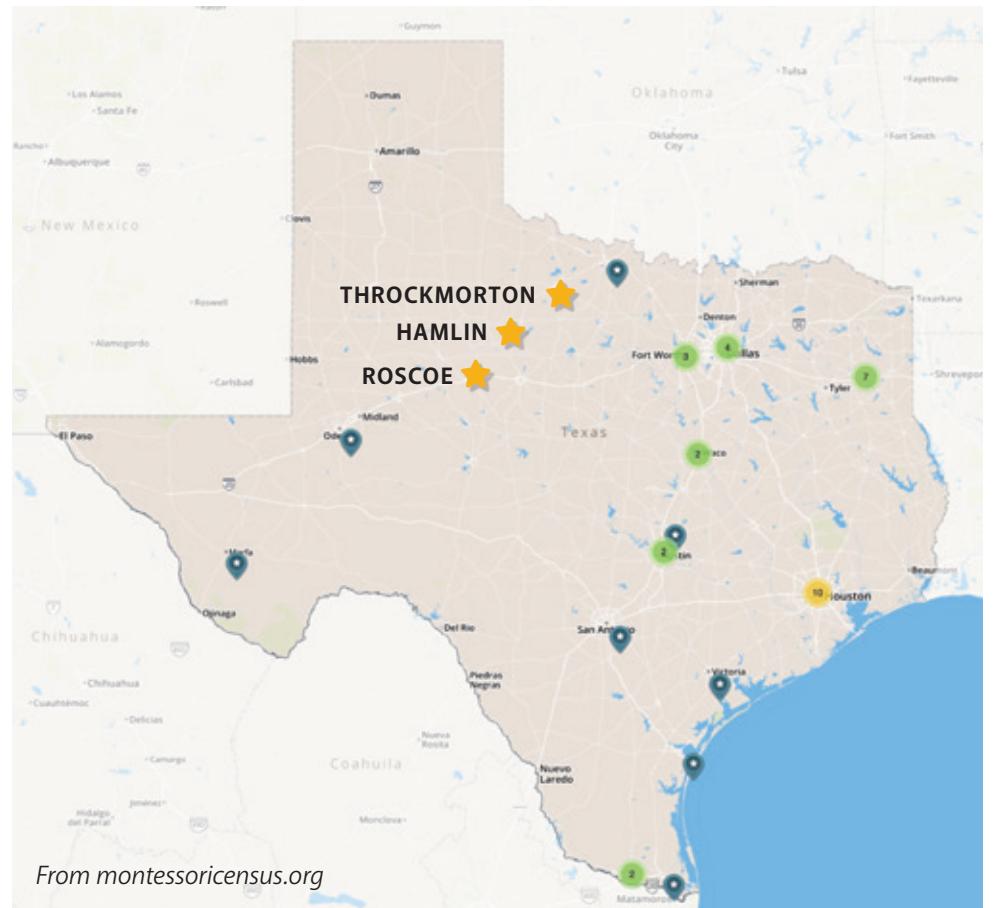
Roscoe implemented Montessori PreK classes last year, with six classrooms serving 25 three-to-six-year-olds in each. Two other nearby small districts are adopting the “P-20 System” and are launching Montessori programs this year.

## Hamlin

I spoke to the superintendents of early adopters of the P-20 model. Dr. Randy Burks, Superintendent at Hamlin Collegiate ISD, told me that the reason this program was important to the Hamlin community is that “people in rural communities are at a 75% disadvantage and it is important to break the cycle of poverty. Rural America is the new inner city and we are looking for pathways and avenues to better life. If we educate our children, they may hope to aspire to things that have not been thought of before.”

When I asked Dr. Burks about the challenges of adopting this model and adding Montessori to the early childhood program, he said “the concerns were if we could afford the modifications needed. There are also financial challenges associated as well as teacher training and raises and stipends.” Even with these challenges, Hamlin CISD plans to implement Montessori through the sixth grade.

Michelle Jones is the Dean of Elementary Education at Hamlin Collegiate Elementary. Mrs. Jones said that they “became part of this initiative in February and made trips to other schools for observations of Montessori classrooms. In April, the decision was made that Hamlin Collegiate Elementary



From [montessoricensus.org](http://montessoricensus.org)

would implement Montessori in the early childhood program.” Jones also stated that the motivation was for “school to be successful, the town to be successful, and that something different was needed. The district would like for school to be a central hub for families.” Some of the challenges that we spoke about were that training teachers was going to be difficult because the closest training centers are in Dallas which is 175 miles away. Some staff members decided to move because of the change. It was important to get the staff and community to buy in to the big changes. Hamlin is starting with three classes of 73 three-to-six-year-olds, and Jones anticipates that the Montessori Program will spiral up through the sixth grade.

## Throckmorton

Later, I was able to meet with Dr. Michelle Cline, Superintendent at Throckmorton Collegiate ISD. Dr. Cline said, “The motivation is to create researchers and thinkers.” She also mentioned that as early adopters of the program, they will receive a charter school grant that will help fund the new method of education. Part of the process that Dr. Cline spoke about was that they discussed Edu-Nation all year. In July, the community became aware due to newspaper articles and social media and information at the senior center. The

teachers were all on board and went to visit other Montessori schools. The biggest challenge was some controversy on social media. However, Throckmorton is launching with two classes serving 28 three-to-six-year-olds and plans to implement the Montessori program through eighth grade.

We face a lot of challenges when implementing different forms of education in small town Texas. The people of the communities are generally set in their ways because they were born and raised in the community and do not want to see anything different come along. However, times are changing, and we have to prepare our children for a new life of innovation and technology. The only way to stop the generational poverty that is so prevalent in our communities is to start with our youngest children and give them the tools to be thinkers and innovators rather than followers. I think we are on the right track. Now we just need to get more school districts on board.

*Leslie Hooper is a Montessorian of 15 years. She has worked in private, charter and public Montessori programs. Leslie is currently mentoring teachers new to Montessori while working on a Master of Education through the Endicott College TIES program.*

# Wildflower—five years of growth

**Radical decentralization has grown and spread**



BY DAVID AYER

Wildflower Schools, a network (or “ecosystem”) of decentralized Montessori microschools, led by pairs of “teacher-leaders”, that support children, teachers, and parents, were the 2014 brainchild of Sep Kamvar, formerly a professor at MIT and the director of the Social Computing group at the MIT Media Lab. (He’s now the co-founder and chairman of Mosaic, “a technology-centered homebuilder that builds community-oriented, car-light neighborhoods,” and Celo, “a cryptocurrency focused on financial inclusion.”)

The schools grew out of Kamvar’s innovative thinking about the intersection of technology and society (he helped develop, among other projects, personalized search for Google), and his search for a preschool for his own child. The programs operate according to nine principles including small scale, teacher leadership, and local connections, and the model is open-source in the sense that anyone can make use of the principles. Kamvar’s interest in

end of the school year.

So how are they doing?

When I spoke with Kramer in the summer of 2016, he was just coming on board and still in a period of exploration and development, and could really only speculate about how things would go. Still, even then he expressed a deep commitment to core Wildflower principles—high quality Montessori, to be sure, but also radical decentralization inherent in one-classroom storefront schools led by teachers. I asked him at the time if public funding was a requirement and while he declined to stake out an organizational position, he pointed to Wildflower’s Equity principle and suggested that it requires low-cost or no-cost access.

There were a lot of open questions at that time: How would the decentralized approach fit into a larger structure? How would Wildflower maintain quality and authenticity in a decentralized organization? How would public financing, or equity of access, be ensured? And, to the question that always comes up with innovative approaches, but especially with the commitment to single-classroom quasi-independent schools, how would this scale? At the time, Kramer speculated, although this was never an organizational goal, that there might be as many 1,000 Wildflower schools in ten years’ time—implying a doubling in numbers every year for ten years, yet still just scratching the surface of the public education landscape.

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**“You don’t need one person to tell another person what to do. It’s a different paradigm.”**

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technology attracted a lot of attention at the time, with proposals for sensors in children’s shoes and ceiling-mounted cameras to track their movements and assist in observation.

The network started small, with one school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and grew to eight in 2015-16, when Kamvar teamed up with Matt Kramer, then co-CEO of Teach for America, to establish the Wildflower Foundation to support growth and development. Over the last five years, the network has grown to what will be nearly three dozen schools across ten cities by the

The 2016-17 school year saw Wildflower mostly building infrastructure, exploring options for expansion, and settling in. Just three more schools were opened: two more in Cambridge and one in Puerto Rico, joining two that were already there. Wildflower also developed its “hub city” model, a Fellowship program for new teacher-leaders, a build-out of back-end services for billing, payroll, record-keeping, and more. Growth picked up in 2017-18, with five new schools and three new states (Kentucky, Rhode Island, and Minnesota). Six more schools launched



*Growing organically at Wildflower*

in 2018-19, including two in new hubs in Indiana and New Jersey.

2019-20 looks to be the biggest growth year yet, with 13 new programs in all. Four have already launched, including another in Puerto Rico (bringing the island’s total to five) and two in a new hub in North Carolina. Nine more are slated to open this fall and winter, including three in new hubs in California and Ohio.

So is this Wildflower’s big moment? This year will take them from 22 schools to 35, not exactly doubling, but still an impressive rate of growth. About 500 children are enrolled in Wildflower schools in all. The organization points out that nothing in Montessori is spreading faster—bringing access to Montessori to more places—than they are. So what kinds of schools are they? Are they moving the proverbial needle on growing access to high-quality developmental education?

The answer, I think, is that Wildflower is settling into who it’s going to be—which may not be exactly what they thought they would become initially, but which is certainly something worth becoming.

There has definitely been consistent growth. Kramer said that this is more a function of better organization, support, structures, implementation coaching, etc., than progression towards internal growth targets. Wildflower just doesn’t

work that way—they follow the needs and interests of the communities they work with, rather than aiming for a predetermined number or rate. “Organic growth has many wonderful aspects, but it doesn’t always produce a factory-ish methodical production timeline,” Kramer said.

These days, Kramer anticipates continued growth in line with the last few years, which has been about 50% per year—still an impressive rate, but one which might take the schools to more like 100 over ten years. “The network will grow at the pace that it warrants, based on how many parents, teachers, philanthropists think it’s a good idea,” Kramer explained. “Our job is to solve the problems in front of us.” After this recent expansion period, Wildflower is concentrating on its ten cities for now, and not necessarily looking to expand into other cities or regions in the immediate future.

The current schools mostly serve ages birth to three and/or three to six, with just four elementary programs and one high school (Girasol, in Puerto Rico). And they mostly rely on tuition (which is not unusual for infant, toddler, and preschool care in the U.S.). About half of these accept local public funding for child care, and all Wildflower schools embrace a principle of equity and do their best to provide low cost access as needed. Three schools in Minnesota are charters.

On the technology side, progress has been slower than expected. Engineers have spent a lot of the last two years on what turned out to be a “hard problem”: knowing not just approximately, but precisely, who works on what when—distinguishing interactions rather than proximity. Some of those problems have been solved, new ones have emerged, and overall Kramer is optimistic that within a year, the systems will be able to generate usable information for teachers who choose to use them.

What comes across most strongly from Wildflower, though, is the deep commitment to radical decentralization, autonomy, and distributed authority.

In its earlier stages, Wildflower seemed like it would act something like a charter authorizer. Potential teacher-leaders came to the Foundation, which reviewed and approved plans. But the organization has worked to push that authority—and the responsibility that comes with it—back down to operators. Kramer described a process where emerging teacher-leaders go through an application process emphasizing self-reflection. They convene a

panel of existing teacher-leaders, ideally one in the hub where they want to work and one outside their hub for added perspective, to review and advise on their plans. Critically, that advice, which can range from “that’s so inspiring, start planning!” to “we’re not sure you’ve thought that through” is just that: advice, not authorization. The new leaders don’t have to listen, but they typically do—after all, they want to do the best program they can.

Once a school is up and running, it can become a part of a “pod” of a few nearby schools. These groups often have multi-school “faculty meetings” once or twice a month, sharing resources, strategies, and procedures, and reflecting on the Wildflower principles. The network is essentially self-policing and self-maintaining, and a pod does have the power to remove a school from the network, although that has not yet taken place.

This structure doesn’t always come naturally to participants, and it has been some work for partners and teachers to take ownership and responsibility for Wildflower principles and practices. “People tend to ask, ‘Who do I really

work for?’” Kramer said. Getting to people to understand and trust that no-one is coming to supervise has been a process.

But Kramer sees it as more than worthwhile—as essential to the enterprise. “You don’t need one person to tell another person what to do. It’s a different paradigm. Everyone who comes here takes a little while to figure it out. It’s like Montessori’s fostering of independence.”

I had the opportunity to speak with a new Wildflower teacher-leader, Maya Soriano at Lirio Montessori, a two-way bilingual Spanish immersion program in Minneapolis serving three to six year-olds in a highly diverse, heavily Spanish-speaking neighborhood. Soriano came to Montessori from Teach for America and Los Angeles public schools, and taught in Spanish immersion classes in Minneapolis before “stumbling on” Montessori through her own child. When she wanted to offer Montessori to historically underserved families of color and Latinx families, Wildflower offered her the structure and the independence to launch a school. I asked her

the same question about scale: As good as this is, shouldn’t there be more of it? She thought it was a good question, but in the end, she told me, “That just isn’t who we are—it’s not our approach to making change.”

She sees more impact happening on the small-scale, hyperlocal interactions that this model makes possible. She sees teaching as activism and a vehicle for equity, not just for the children, but for the families and the community. Families of color could become Fellows, trailblazers, teacher-leaders themselves, and the micro school model allows Soriano to be directly involved in building true community engagement, and making community change.

And that’s Wildflower.

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



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# Public Montessori gets its start in Ohio

## A roll call of famous Montessori names



BY MARTA DONAHOE,  
JULIE KUGLER-ACKLEY, AND  
MARY LIZA VERTUCCA

Cincinnati, home of the first U.S. public Montessori school as well as the first public Montessori high school, has a history with roots in the earliest days of the Montessori resurgence in this country beginning in the 1950s.

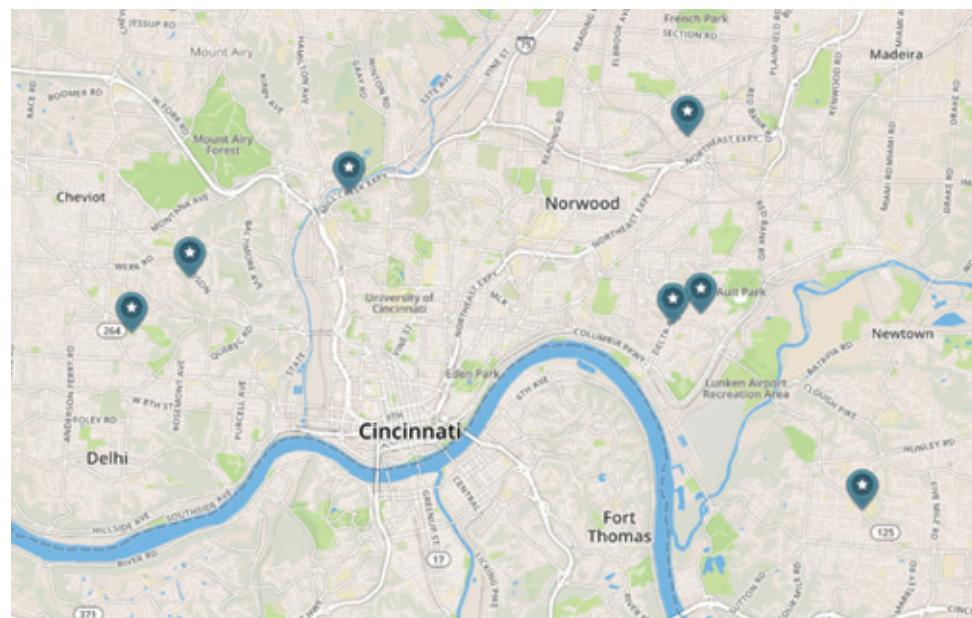
The first Montessori school opened in the U.S. in Tarrytown, New York, in 1911, and the method was met with a rush of enthusiasm. Maria Montessori herself visited the country in 1913, and in 1915 famously presented a “glass classroom” at the Panama–Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco as well as offering an international training course. After 1915, however, the rush subsided in the face of criticism and conflict, and from the 1920s to the 1960s the approach persisted mostly in a few private Catholic schools. Maria Montessori herself passed away in 1952 without seeing the movement reawaken in this country.

In 1953, however, Nancy McCormick Rambusch, then a new parent in Greenwich, Connecticut, traveled to Paris to attend the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) Tenth

Greenwich in 1958, launching a training program, and founding the American Montessori Society (AMS).

Soon hundreds of nuns and lay teachers were studying Montessori on their own, and opening schools in parishes and private institutions. In Cincinnati two Catholic schools opened: Summit Country Day (1962) and Mercy Montessori (1969). Cincinnati Country Day also began in 1962, with Hilda Rothschild as lead teacher. Rothschild, in her 50s at the time, had trained with Maria Montessori herself in Europe in the 1930s and was already a prominent Montessorian and an early childhood, special needs, anti-poverty advocate. In 1965, as a faculty member at Xavier University, she helped use a Carnegie grant to establish the country’s first University-affiliated Montessori teacher training program. Rothschild’s name became synonymous with Montessori education in the city.

In the 1970s, Montessori preschool education flourished in Cincinnati due to the program at Xavier, as many teachers earned AMS credentials and opened schools throughout the region. These schools and the families they served would be the societal support for the future establishment of public Montessori elementary programs. The nascent private elementary programs could only serve a small number of children. Tuition was a barrier for many families who could not afford private school, but believed in public education and wanted Montessori for their children. Still, it was ten years before the first public pro-



From [montessoricensus.org](http://montessoricensus.org)

Rambusch to join Xavier’s faculty for over a year. Rambusch’s earlier work had fostered myriad private Montessori schools, but in 1975 her work signaled a new movement, bringing Montessori to the mainstream. She participated in the teacher training, worked on-site, and taught at the new Montessori school in Cincinnati. Her presence brought national interest and local enthusiasm to the project.

Rambusch was joined by Martha McDermott, a Scottish native who had trained in London in 1959 with Claude Clermont and Muriel Dwyer, and had worked with Rambusch and Margaret Stephenson in the U.S. She had joined the Xavier faculty in 1968, collaborating with Rothschild. After serving as the Children’s House lab school guide and professor, McDermott traveled to Bergamo, Italy in 1973, where she earned her AMI elementary teacher credential. Upon her return to the US in 1975, she created the first elementary class for the Xavier lab school, and began teaching elementary Montessori graduate students.

In the mid-1970s, Cincinnati, like many U.S. cities, still had largely segregated schools, and were under increasing pressure to integrate. In fact, 1974 saw the filing of the “Bronson case” by legendary activist, NAACP leader, and City Councilwoman Marian Spencer, which drove further Montessori expansion in the 1980s. Spencer had earlier been a leader in the fight to desegregate Coney Island, an amusement park in Cincinnati.

Public school systems saw the potential for avoiding the upheaval of bussing by offering “school choice.” “Alternative”

or “Magnet” schools gave parents the opportunity to send their children to schools outside their neighborhood districts, in order to draw white families in to predominantly black schools. In 1975, in response to a desegregation lawsuit, the new Children’s House in Mount Adams, serving kindergarten through third grade, opened its doors. Integration efforts were successful and two more schools opened shortly thereafter. Interest in the model continued to grow, and by 1979 the three programs were moved to the West End of Cincinnati and renamed Sands Montessori School after the original Sands School, itself originally opened in 1913 and named for 19th century teacher George F. Sands.

In the mid-1970’s demand for Montessori teachers soared. Cincinnati public schools contracted with the teacher education program at Xavier for training. Classes were held at the lab school in the evening, on weekends and during the summer. Student teaching took place in the teachers’ own classrooms. The training was offered at little or no expense if teachers agreed to teach in Cincinnati public Montessori schools for three years.

The 1980s and 1990s saw several more schools open, driven both by the 1984 settlement of the Bronson lawsuit, and parent demand. North Avondale Montessori School opened in 1981 and now serves more than 500 children from Pre-K through 6th grade. Carson, now renamed Dater Montessori School, launched in 1986 with fewer than 200 students and now serves more than 750 through 6th grade. In 1994 Winton, now Parker Woods Montessori School,

## In the mid-1970s, Cincinnati still had largely segregated schools, and was under increasing pressure to integrate

International Congress. She became friends with Montessori’s son Mario, then the Executive Director of AMI, took a training course in London, and worked to bring the model home. It was a period of change and conflict in the American Catholic Church, but as a member of the church, Rambusch felt a Montessori education would offer children more than the traditional parochial experience. It wasn’t long before she convinced others of the same, helping to open the Whitby School in

gram could be realized.

Establishing the first public Montessori school was no small feat, and credit is due to the determination of four inspiring women. Hilda Rothschild had brought Montessori’s vision to Cincinnati in the 1960s. In 1974, Ramona Drennan, director of the Montessori Education Program at Xavier, garnered grants from the Jergens and Martha Holden Jennings foundations to develop a public school. The generous funding provided an opportunity for Nancy

became Cincinnati's fourth magnet Montessori school, now serving more than 500 children through 6th grade.

### Montessori High School

In 1992, after drop-out rates in Cincinnati public Montessori schools had increased to over 50%, the Board of Education entertained the possibility of opening a Montessori secondary program. Bob Townsend, head of magnet schools, gathered parents, teachers, and administrators to create a philosophy statement for the program.

Within a couple of months, philosophy statement in hand, Montessori elementary teachers across Cincinnati collaborated to create a program proposal. The team visited private Montessori adolescent programs, and took a NAMTA Summer Erdkinder Course (then called the "Urban Experiment"). Larry Schaeffer of Minneapolis, and Pat Ludick and John Long of Cleveland's Ruffing East Montessori, pioneers in Montessori secondary work, helped support the program and Betsy Coe, director of Houston Montessori Center provided training.

In 1994, the board of Education accepted the program proposal. That fall, the program began as a school-within-a-school with an enrollment of about 60 seventh graders. It was the beginning of what would become a full six-year secondary school and the first Montessori high school in the country. Marta Donahoe was the program coordinator, and Brandt Smith and Bruce Weil were the first teachers hired.

The following year, the Montessori Secondary Program was renamed Clark Montessori after Peter H. Clark, a pioneering African-American educator. Most of Clark's students come from four of Cincinnati's public Montessori elementary schools, some from private Montessori schools, and others from public schools. There are no academic requirements to enter the program, but students and families must sign an agreement to attend Clark. Of the students, 95% have previous Montessori education. Because students come from many parts of the city, the school is rich in diversity.

In 2005, demand for more Montessori secondary education drove the creation



Nancy McCormick Rambusch

of another high school at Westside, later renamed James N. Gamble Montessori High School after James Norris Gamble, son of the founder of Procter and Gamble and the formulator of Ivory soap. The school launched as two 7th grade classrooms in the basement of Dater and now serves 500 middle and high school students.

Another elementary program, Pleasant Ridge Montessori, opened in

2006 as Cincinnati's first "neighborhood" public Montessori school, now serving 600 children through 6th grade. Enrollment is open to any family living within the school's catchment area and. A new program, Gamble Elementary, is opening this fall with five classrooms through 6th grade.

Today, Cincinnati public Montessori schools, in partnership with Xavier University, continue to guide students from early childhood through the passage to adulthood. These programs honor the dignity of each child, instilling in them a great sense of humanity and hope for the future.

*Marta Donahoe has worked in public and private Montessori schools since 1979. She was named the 2019 AMS Living Legacy for her contribution to the larger Montessori community.*

*Julie Kugler-Ackley is a Senior Teaching Professor at the Xavier University Montessori Teacher Education Program.*

*Mary Lisa Vertuca is a Senior Teaching Professor in the Childhood Education Program at Xavier.*

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# Public Montessori ECE sprouting in Oregon

**A small program thrives and grows**



BY **DAVID AYER**

Alder Montessori, a tiny Children's House program housed in a public school in Oregon, has survived its first few harsh winters and continues to send up green shoots.

Alder is a two-classroom, tuition-free Children's House program embedded within Alder Elementary School, a Title I, 86% FRL, K-5 school serving a demographically diverse population of about 400 children. The school is in Reynolds School District, one of the most poverty-impacted districts in Oregon even as it sits adjacent to the relatively prosperous

Portland School District. Reynolds SD is majority Latinx, but more than 30 languages are spoken within the students' homes, including Somali, Russian, and Vietnamese, and a host of others.

Alder got started in 2015 as a collaboration between I Have a Dream Oregon, Reynolds School District, and Montessori Northwest, Portland's AMI teacher training center. I Have a Dream, since renamed Greater Than, works in

whole-school model to follow students through to high school and on to college and employment. Alder Montessori initially served just three- and four-year-olds, funded by private philanthropy and Oregon's high-quality public preschool funding pilot, Preschool Promise. Kindergarten age children entered Alder Elementary's regular classes.

The program grew from its humble beginnings of 20 students, eventually

- A full three-to-six age range including "Kindergarten" age children
- A summer program to meet the needs of families when public school is not in session
- Home visits for new and returning families to support family engagement with the program and with children's development

The licensed teachers and full age range are already in place, and the other elements are under development at Alder. Expansion to additional locations is planned for the 2020-21 school year. Reynolds has expressed interest in exploring the Alder model as an Early Childhood Education (ECE) system for other schools in the district, and AEME expects the fully-implemented Montessori model to be attractive and replicable as more Oregon education stakeholders and policy-makers see the program in action.

Alder trees are considered a "pioneer species" in the Pacific Northwest, where they characteristically take root in poor soil at the foot of retreating gla-

## More than 20 languages are spoken in the area, including Somali, Russian, and Vietnamese

Oregon to support students from poverty-impacted communities through education, partnering with supports for families from cradle to career, and works with Alder Elementary to implement a

serving more than 40 families, building family engagement and a robust waiting list for the program. But while the program has steadily grown, the organizational structure has changed a bit, moving away from the Montessori Northwest aegis and eventually to a home of its own. In 2019, a new organization was formed, the Alliance for Equity in Montessori Education (AEME, online at [montessori-equity.org](http://montessori-equity.org)), able to focus exclusively on Alder Montessori and to further develop and extend the program, and to replicate the model in other public-school systems.

Keeping the five-year olds in the Montessori classroom has been a challenge for Alder Montessori since the beginning. The school district naturally expected five-year-olds to enroll in Alder Elementary. But with the formation of AEME, and months of networking, persistence, and negotiation, that challenge has been met. Beginning this September, both classrooms retained their five-year old children for the full three-to-six age range, staffed with an Oregon-licensed, Montessori-trained teacher partially funded by the district. This kind of collaboration is unusual in the public education world, so it's a credit to all participants that they were able to create this structure to seamlessly support children's development.

The next steps for Alder Montessori and AEME are developing and spreading it this pilot program. Four core elements have been identified for the pilot program and any expansions:

- State-licensed, Montessori trained teachers with a MACTE-accredited certification



*Persistence pays off*

ciars, or in areas damaged or disturbed by floods, fires, or windstorms. They fix massive amounts of nitrogen in the soil, improving its fertility and preparing the way for sturdier, more long-lived trees. There couldn't be a much better metaphor for what Alder and AEME hope to achieve.

*David Ayer is the Communications Director for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, and a board member of the Alliance for Equity in Montessori Education.*



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# Sabater: Hidden figures no more – Black Montessori

*continued from page 1*

and that the 1964 Civil Rights Act allowed Blacks “access [to] mainstream educational funding for Montessori pre-schools [to be reestablished.]”

CHAMP, led by Roslyn D. Williams, was one of those organizations that secured post-Civil Rights Act funding. Debs describes Williams as seeking to take Montessori from being “the rich child’s right” to “the poor child’s opportunity” and noted that Williams was a “tireless organizer, [who] successfully petition[ed] the American Montessori Society to approve a CHAMP teacher training program in 1968, the first Black-led Montessori training program in the country—yet another example of inspirational history, hidden in plain sight.

Grimstead, who joyfully recalls working at CHAMP in several capacities including leading the teacher training program, ended her discussion of Roslyn D. Williams, who founded the first Montessori school in Harlem, by pointing out how Williams developed several “impressive achievements” for Black Montessori education in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The CHAMP Teacher Education Program (now under the name to West Side Montessori School-Teacher Education Program) celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2018.

Sylvia Townsend also discussed the legacy of Roslyn D. Williams, who founded CHAMP. Townsend glowingly described how she worked alongside Ms. Williams during the 1980s and 1990s as the Director of the CHAMP TEP. Townsend noted that the Montessori method “fit our yearning...for another approach to educating our [Harlem community] children”. She continued, “I remember her vision was certainly to defy...an elitist approach to education.” In reflection, Townsend notes that “there was somewhat of a spirituality attached to the Montessori Method. It felt to me like the Method spoke to our children [saying]—we see you, we respect you, you have the greatest of potential.” Townsend mused that in the 1980s she was the only Black Montessorian attending Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) conferences, but that she proudly wore her African attire, and now she is grateful to see a room full of people of the global majority at the 2019 MSJ conference. She ended by stating that Williams’ approach was always for excellence,

hoping to position all children to thrive, and one that challenged them “to think, [and] not be thought for.”

While Grimstead and Townsend worked directly with Williams at the CHAMP TEP, Meryl Thompson is a graduate of the program. Thompson’s mother, Lenore G. Briggs, was a Grenadian native who migrated to the USA in 1965. Briggs graduated from

## Many may think that Black folk are newcomers to the Montessori movement

New York University with a M.A. in Early Childhood Education and a pre-primary AMS credential. Thompson noted that “upon graduation in 1986, she (Briggs) immediately transformed her thirteen-year-old day care center into Lefferts Gardens Montessori, the first Black-owned Montessori school, in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Brooklyn” and she sent many of her teachers to be trained at CHAMP.

Briggs believed that every child deserved a Montessori education and she worked tirelessly to fulfill her multi-economic vision for working families, operating year-round from 7:30 in the morning until 6:00 at night, with low tuition rates and acceptance of Agency for Child Development government vouchers. Lefferts Gardens Montessori is currently run by Ms. Briggs’ children, Anthony and Meryl, and has been in operation for over 30 years. Thompson proudly discussed how her mother’s humanitarian contributions to the community inspired many and earned numerous accolades including book chapters and the co-naming of Brooklyn’s Rutland Road to “Lenore G. Briggs Way”.

Echoing the Bible’s statement that “the first shall be last,” we end with Jacqui Miller, who actually presented first on the panel but is chronologically speaking the newest Black Montessori leader on the panel. Miller said that participating on the panel was a privilege and a humbling experience.

Miller is a founder of Stonebrook Montessori, in Cleveland, Ohio. Stonebrook opened in 2015 with “the mission of providing an accessible Montessori school to the children and families of Cleveland.” She told us,

“We intentionally located the school on the city’s under-served East side in the Glenville neighborhood, building on the pioneering work of Alcillia Clifford, who was yet another Black Montessorian Hidden figure that worked as the Executive Director of the Marotta Schools, [which served the Glenville] neighborhood [as well as sites serving four other diverse Cleveland

they were not originally invited by the community to establish the school in that location. Nevertheless, the school continues to genuinely seek to develop responsive community partnerships as a key element of the school’s identity.

Miller concluded that even though she presented her Montessori school’s story first during the panel, she “listened to Meryl, Sylvia and Carolyn share their stories with rapt attention and deep admiration” [because] “the common threads of service, courage and determination inspired and encouraged” all in attendance. Indeed, these remarkable women and their contributions are Hidden Figures no more and their stories shine #BlackExcellence.

*Dr. Ayize Sabater is a co-founder of Nsroma Montessori Consulting, co-founder of Shining Stars Montessori Public Charter School, a co-founding board member of Montessori for Social Justice, a Washington Montessori Institute (WMI) Board member, and Head of School at Willow Oak Montessori.*

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# Miranda: Surviving the storm

*continued from page 1*

the ultimate goal is to “build a system that offers a very good school for everyone, everywhere, so people have the knowledge they need to participate in democracy. This is what would further Montessori’s vision of creating a more just society for all.” This philosophy led the public Montessori movement to triumph during one of the most devastating moments in the history of public education in Puerto Rico, and has set a groundbreaking precedent for public Montessori education worldwide.

In December 2018, a pioneering law established the Montessori Education Secretariat within PRDE, which grants Montessori schools the authority and autonomy to make decisions regarding curriculum and planning, school organization, teacher and staff training, and community participation. Although the Secretariat was first created in 2014 under a flimsy public policy that any secretary of education could annul, the passing of the law ensures the operational mechanisms and resources necessary to sustain the Montessori project within the public infrastructure. It also allows the Montessori Secretariat to maintain its close partnership with INE. A monumental reform achievement in itself, the law was incredibly passed in the midst of Puerto Rico’s most severe public education crisis. The Montessori movement’s responses to this crisis—and its victories—foreshadowed mas-



*Undisturbed by political turbulence*

Montessori school, Juan Ponce de León, began operating with a single environment, INE has ignited system-wide reform based on a school transformation model that equally values collective governance, family and community participation, and Montessori methodology.

## The perfect storm

In late 2016, a fiscal control board known locally as the *Junta* was created under the congressionally-mandated Puerto Rico Oversight, Management,

Rico’s history. Rosselló appointed the controversial U.S. consultant to completely restructure PRDE under the guise of increased efficiency. The overhaul was to include the restructuring of regional administrative offices, massive school consolidations and closures, and the introduction of charter schools and vouchers. In this climate, the public Montessori movement confronted the threat of school closures, a push to convert to a charter network and the possibility that the Secretariat would be dissolved altogether. All of these battles were incredibly won.

## School closures

More than a year before #rickyrenuncia protests forced the governor’s resignation, the public Montessori movement mounted fierce resistance to school closures. Closures are part and parcel of neoliberal education reforms globally, but the scale with which they were orchestrated in Puerto Rico is shocking. During Keleher’s tenure, 442 of roughly 1,300 schools—almost one-third of all public schools in Puerto Rico—were closed. The severity of scope was trumped only by the intensity of execution: closures were announced in March to be finalized by the end of the 2017-18 school year—the same year Hurricane María devastated the archipelago. On the list of proposed closures were 14 of 45 Montessori schools—one-third of the network. As soon as the closures

were announced, collective governance practices were immediately activated to resist: the entire network would fight for their 14 sister schools. Forming a united front, an aggressive campaign was launched to denounce the closures in the media, to PRDE officials, and to Puerto Rican legislators and elected officials at all levels. Press conferences were convened and panels of students, teachers, and family members articulated the potentially devastating effects of their schools closing. (You can see compelling videos featuring student testimonies at: [www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/estudiantesdefiendensu-montessori-2417465](http://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/estudiantesdefiendensu-montessori-2417465).)

Parents, faculty and community leaders intensely lobbied local politicians, demanding that their schools remain open. Long negotiation processes with PRDE ensued, but the terms were clear: all Montessori schools must remain open, not a single school would be lost. By June 2018, the movement had successfully lobbied to keep all fourteen schools open.

## Charter status

In March 2018, Education Reform Law 85 ushered in charter schools for the first time in Puerto Rico’s history. Before the law passed, Keleher already planned to convert Montessori schools into a charter network and informed García Blanco of this plan in early 2017, arguing that charter status would offer

## The public Montessori movement has been on the front lines, mobilizing school communities to demand government transparency, citizen participation, and educational equity

sive protests this summer against the Rosselló administration’s austerity measures and corruption, and embody how community empowerment can successfully drive equitable and sustainable education reform. Current Secretary of Montessori Education, Rosa Recondo, jokes that Montessori is the “excuse” for school transformation, but underscores that the movement is about much more. Indeed, since 1993 when the first public

and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA). The *Junta*’s call for sweeping government cutbacks intensified and escalated neoliberal interventions into Puerto Rico’s public education system. Julia Keleher, former secretary of education whose abrupt resignation in April 2019 after sixteen months in office was quickly followed by her arrest on federal charges of corruption, is the face most associated with this chapter of Puerto

greater allocation of resources as well as protect Montessori schools from massive, system-wide closures already underway. García Blanco's response once again activated the principals of collective governance: the decision to convert to a charter network—or not—had to be made by the entire public Montessori

had been lying dormant for over a year. García Blanco read about the senator's efforts in the newspaper, and forwarded the news to INE's school network. Primed by its experience against school closures, the entire community rallied once again. The movement activated community leaders, families, teachers,

## The ultimate goal is to “build a system that offers a very good school for everyone, everywhere, so people have the knowledge they need to participate in democracy.”

school community. INE designed a consultation process in which information was gathered and school communities evaluated the pros and cons of conversion. Meetings were held with students, families, guides, directors and community leaders. A position declaration was drafted. After months of deliberation, the collective rejected conversion to a charter network for two main reasons. The notion that converting to charter status would offer an advantage over other schools profoundly contradicts the public Montessori movement's philosophy of quality education for all. Charter status would also inherently compromise collective governance practices; under the charter system, the Secretariat would cease to exist and INE would become an authority charged with administering all schools in the network. The public Montessori model is based on collective decision-making among schools, INE and the Secretariat. The declaration asserted that the Montessori Secretariat was the best option for the movement's optimal implementation within the public system.

### Secretariat established

Paradoxically, the legal establishment of the Secretariat in December 2018 was not directly impelled by the movement itself. As daily battles were being waged to keep schools open, children learning, and the project alive, a local senator visited a public Montessori school and was impressed. She revived a bill for the legal establishment of the Secretariat that

and local politicians in overwhelming support of the bill. As it made its way through legislature, Keleher proposed to include INE's charter status as part of the law, but the movement lobbied politicians to reject this proposal. The intact bill made its way to the governor's desk for final approval. For days, thousands of students, families, teachers, school directors, INE staff, and community leaders sent messages to the governor's office in support of the Secretariat. Rosselló signed the bill into law on December 28, 2018.

In moments of extreme adversity, the public Montessori movement in Puerto Rico achieved remarkable education reform and demonstrated the profound impact traditionally disenfranchised groups can attain when they unite and fight for their collective demands. This commitment to social justice coupled with the power of families and school communities to organize as agents in the best interests of their children are inspiration for public Montessori more broadly.

*Katherine Miranda has worked in education for over fifteen years, including teaching at the middle school, undergraduate, and graduate levels, and designing and implementing professional development programs.*

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# Ayer: the public Montessori landscape

*continued from page 3*

right now is that there were about 500 in 2018, and there are about 500 now. A few have closed, a few have opened, a few have moved or consolidated, but the number of schools is about the same.

So... we're not growing, then? No, we're definitely growing. Public Montessori has added six to nine schools a year for at least the last five years. And, closures are often smaller schools with declining enrollment. While new schools may start small, they're naturally at the beginning their growth trajectory, so more new schools is good for growth even if the count stays the same. And some closures are actually growth: this year, for example, Arlington Public Schools consolidated five school-within-a-school classrooms into one stand-alone permanent home, a big advance. But the count went down.

In fact, maybe the number of schools isn't the right metric. It doesn't capture the consolidations and relocations, and it entirely misses the expansions. Many new schools plan to expand by a grade a year when they open, but the school count would say the same. What we really care about is the number of children we're reaching. This is a harder number to get. Schools can update that information on the Census, of course—and a big thanks to the more than 140 who have! But we know that's a lot to ask of school leaders already playing multiple roles.

But we've recently been able to access a whole new source of data: the federal government. Now that we have a better idea of what's really an operating public Montessori school and what isn't, we've recently been able to match those schools to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) database. Their detailed information is about two years behind—they have a lot of schools to keep track of—so this is from the 2016-17 school year. But here's what we know now.

First, how many children? In 2016-17, there were 180,000 children in 455 public Montessori schools. With the new schools that have opened but not yet reported data, we can safely estimate that number at 200,000 today. That's a number that starts to have some impact. When next year's numbers come out, we'll finally be able to start talking confidently about percentage growth.

Next, where are they? The short

answer: the south. 37% of the schools and 45% of the children are in the 13 states making up this region, which accounts for just 38% of the U.S. population. Nationwide, 74% of the schools are in cities or large suburbs, 14% are rural, and 12% are in between.

What are the children like? In round numbers, 60,000 in 1st-3rd grade, 50,000 in 4th-6th, 40,000 in Pre-K and K (using the government's categories), and 24,000 in secondary school, mostly middle school, but including 7,000 in high school. Overall, 44% report as White, 25% as Black, and 21% as Hispanic (these categories can overlap). 57% are in Title I Eligible schools nationally, but that goes up to 73% in the south. 44% qualify for free or reduced lunch (a standard proxy for socio-economic status), below the national average of 52%, but in the south that goes up to 61%.

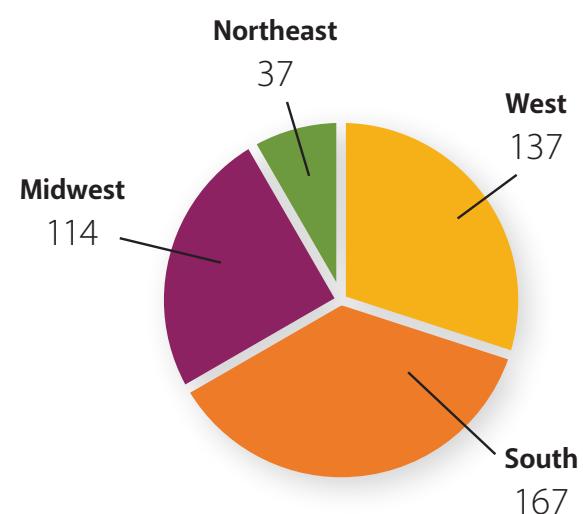
This is all from a quick look at the data. There's a lot more in there, and we're working on integrating the Census data (which has things the government doesn't, such as Montessori age groupings and affiliation) with the NCES trove. We're working towards a Montessori "data repository" where participating schools can track and compare their own data, including input and output measures such as Developmental Environment Rating Scale (DERS) observations and test scores, and researchers can dig more deeply into what's working best. Look to see further developments and more analysis in NCMPS communications.

And please, check you school's Census listing at [montessoricensus.org](http://montessoricensus.org). If your school is listed and up to date, that's great! Someone at work has given it some attention. If not—it's easy to claim and update a school. Follow the instructions on the site, or reach out to us for help. Our data-loving team is standing by.

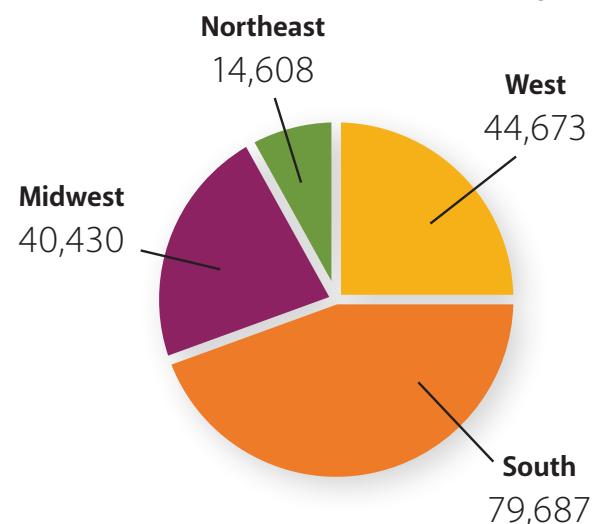
*David Ayer is the Communications Director for the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector.*

*Data from [montessoricensus.org](http://montessoricensus.org)*

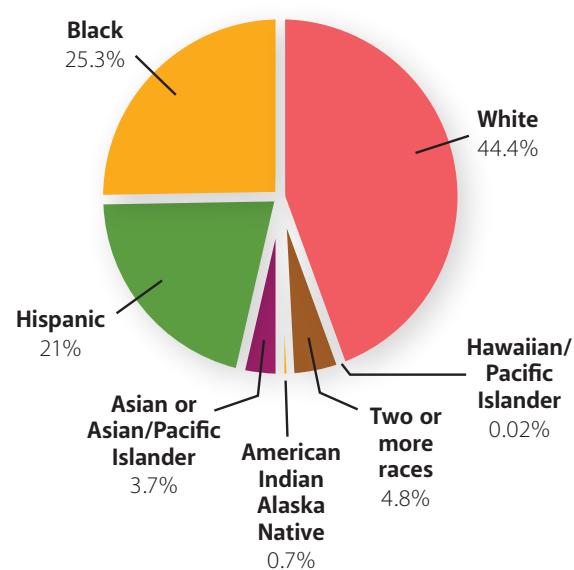
## Schools



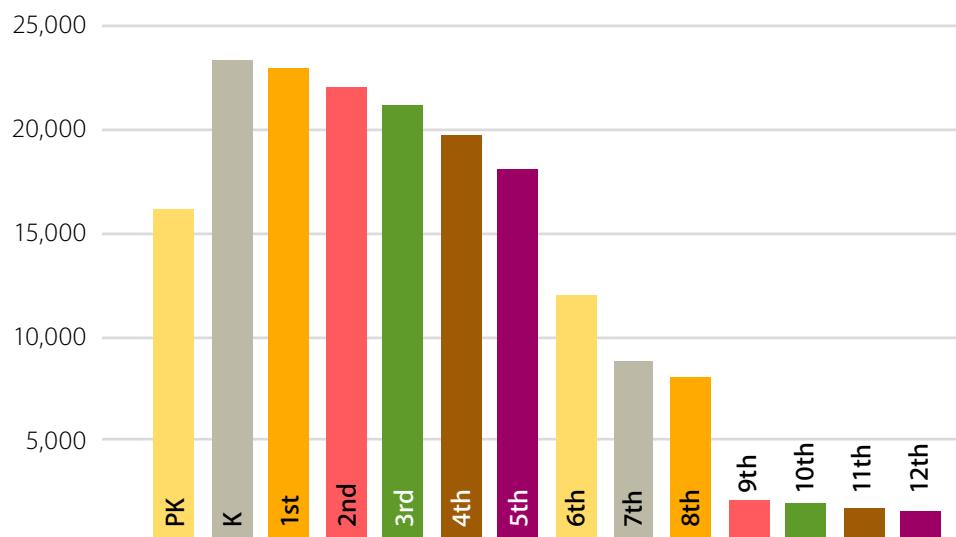
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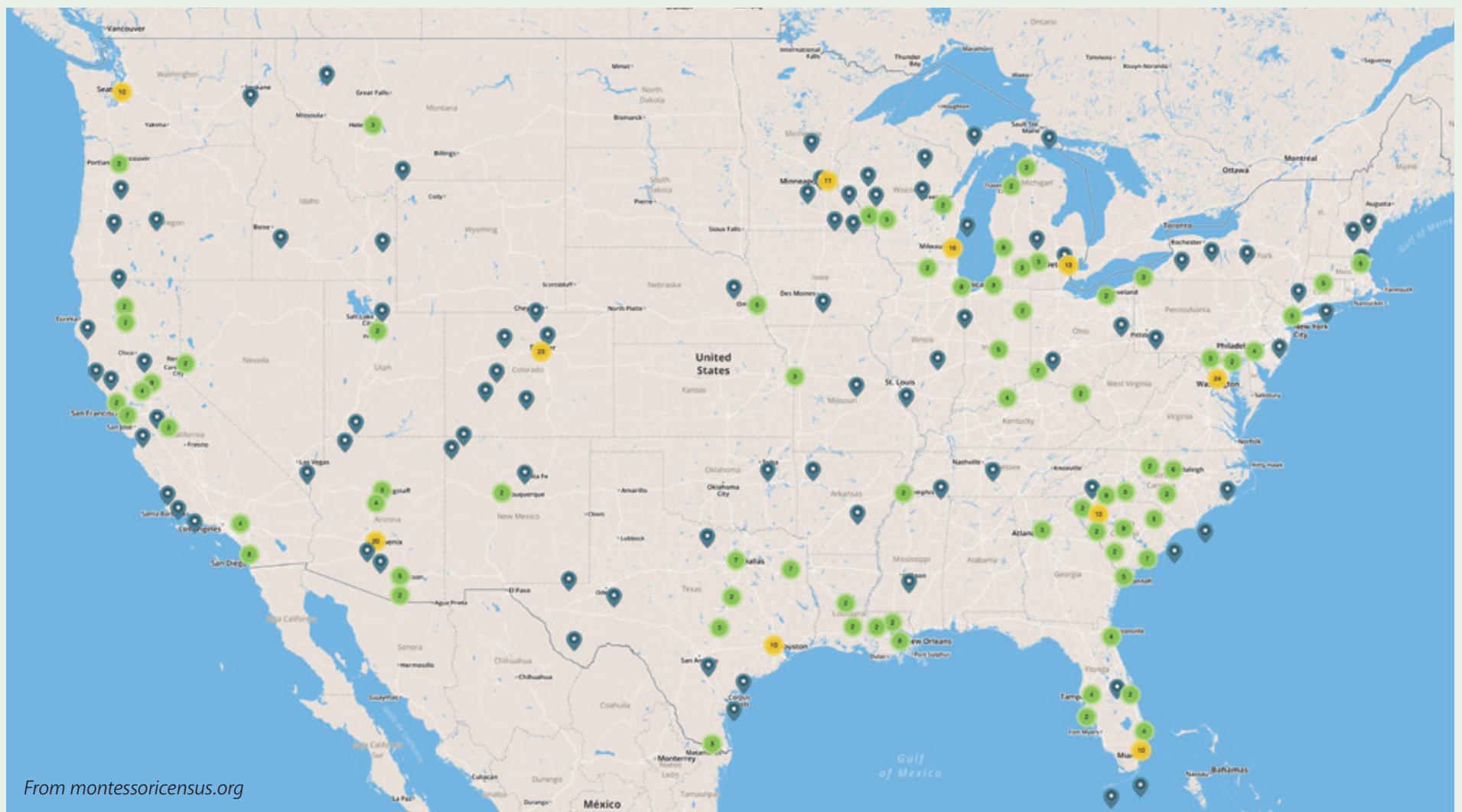


## Race



## by Grade





## New and expanding public Montessori programs

**Washington, DC** • Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School, a charter serving 200 children from three years old through 1st grade, added a second campus last year and has expanded to serve 2nd grade this year. Lee Montessori Public Charter School, another DC charter, is opening a new campus east of the Anacostia river, a historically impoverished and underserved area of the city. The campus will serve 88 three and four year-olds and plans to add a toddler program in 2020 and a new grade level each year, growing to an enrollment of 400 by 2026.

**Arlington, Virginia** • Arlington County Public Schools' Montessori programs have long been distributed across the system as "school-within-a-school" programs, but they will now be housed in one school, Patrick Henry Elementary school, serving nearly 500 students from kindergarten through 5th grade.

**Cincinnati, Ohio** • Cincinnati Public Schools' historic public Montessori program will add a new program, Gamble Montessori Elementary School, at the former home of Gamble Montessori High School, which is moving. The school will offer three three-to-six classrooms, one for 1st through 3rd grade, and one for 4th through 6th.

**Merced, California** • Merced City School district, which has long offered a Montessori elementary program now serving 90 children from 1st through 6th grade at Ada Givens Elementary, is opening an early childhood program serving 40 children.

**Tulsa, Oklahoma** • Emerson Elementary, which launched as Oklahoma's first public Montessori school last year, will expand as planned to third grade this year. Four more teachers are entering training to staff the expanded 1st-3rd grade classrooms.

**West Texas** • Three small west Texas school districts in Roscoe, Hamlin,

and Throckmorton, are implementing Montessori programs as part of a broader effort to build "college readiness." Hamlin and Throckmorton are launching five Primary classrooms serving about 100 children. Roscoe started Primary last year and is expanding to Elementary this year.

**Norwalk, Connecticut** • Brookside Elementary, a Title I school in Norwalk Public Schools, will launch a Montessori program with two classrooms for three-to-six-year-olds. The plan is to extend the program gradually into the elementary years.

**Baldwin County, Georgia** • Baldwin County Schools is launching two pre-K classrooms serving 40 children (funded by Georgia's Bright From the Start program) and two K-1 classes at Lakeview Primary.

### In the works for 2020 and beyond

**Seaford, Delaware** • Sussex Montessori, a planned K-6 charter supposed by Montessori Works, a

Delaware nonprofit "founded to increase accessible, authentic, quality Montessori education in Delaware," plans to launch in 2020 with K through 3rd grade and add a level each year through 6th grade.

**Elk River, Minnesota** • Three Rivers Montessori, a K-6 charter which had planned to open this year, was awarded a CSP start-up grant from the Minnesota Department of Education. The grant came later than expected, so enrollment and launch has been pushed back to 2020.

**Pullman, Washington** • A charter school is in the planning stages, expecting to open its doors in the fall of 2021.

**Traverse City, Michigan** • Traverse City Area Public Schools (TCAPS) has approved construction of a new building to house the current Montessori at Glen Loomis program serving toddlers through 6th grade. The new building, slated to open in 2021, will expand to 8th grade.

# Foundations for inclusion

## The storied Hellbrügge program comes to the U.S. at last



BY TRISHA WILLINGHAM

We all know that Maria Montessori started her work with atypically developing children, saw great results, and then put her energy into bringing her method to mainstream children.

Somewhere along the way, many of us in America have forgotten that a Montessori education is for every child.

Yet there have been some educators who sought to stay close to Montessori's

It may seem strange that a Montessori revolution would start in the medical community. But consider the differences among children that Montessori educators observe. Many of them are based on physiological differences children were born with. Others are due to events in the child's life, but they too have a physiological basis. And of course, Montessori has always been a scientifically-based pedagogy—Dr. Montessori was a physician herself.

Today, there are educators in the U.S. working to maintain and enhance inclusive Montessori education. Montessori Medical Partnerships for Inclusion is a membership association of Montessorians, medical professionals, families, and Montessori school leaders led by Catherine Massie and Barbara Luborsky. The organization is based in Maryland and comprises many experts

## Inclusion, however, means our environments are prepared to meet the needs of all children.

original vision. In the 1960s, Dr. Theodor Hellbrügge (1919-2014), a German pediatrician who focused his research on child development partnered with Mario Montessori to revolutionize the medical community's approach to the development of children, taking a more holistic approach to children's health, and using Montessori as the vehicle. In 1991, Hellbrügge created the Theodor Hellbrügge Foundation "to teach, practice and promote Social Pediatrics and Developmental Rehabilitation to help children with disabilities around the world, through early diagnosis, therapy and social integration in families, kindergarten and school."

In 1971, Hellbrügge worked with Mario Montessori to offer an Inclusive Montessori Education Course. Although Hellbrügge and AMI parted ways in 1996, the training academy in Munich, *International Academy for Developmental Rehabilitation and Pediatric Training*, provides courses and training to share the Hellbrügge legacy with pediatricians, psychologists and educators around the world. This summer, faculty from the Academy came to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to share their work with the U.S. Montessori community.

from the U.S., Canada, and Australia as well as Munich, Germany.

This summer's session was an intensive two-week, 80-hour course for Montessorians of all trainings with the goal of bringing the concept of inclusion closer to the ideal in the U.S., using principles pioneered by Dr. Hellbrügge. It was largely composed of developmental lectures by distinguished medical professionals who had medical expertise, Montessori Inclusive education training, and Montessori therapy training. They showed attendees how these three areas of knowledge can mutually support one another for the child's benefit. The course also offered practice in adapting Montessori lessons and hands-on experimentation with therapeutic practices that can be used with children.

I was fortunate enough to attend the course. Here I summarize some of the key conclusions, in the hopes that many will strike a chord, and readers will see the possibility of better education of atypical learners in Montessori Classrooms.

## The long-term goal is to move from integration to inclusion

Integration is welcoming atypically developing children into our environments; that's the current state in many Montessori classrooms. Inclusion, however, means our environments are prepared to meet the needs of all children.

## Teams of specialists must work together because you can't separate the pieces of a child

Pediatricians, psychologists, therapists, parents, and Montessori guides all share input, observations, and knowledge and come up with agreed-upon goals. The parents' voice is the most important because they spend the most time with the child. In Munich, they go so far as to house all elements in one place: the University, the school, the hospital, the therapists and even housing for families when intensive therapy is needed.

## A deep understanding of development is needed and used for assessment

What is typical, and how does this child compare to typical development? How can we support them in getting to the next step? Sometimes the sequence we learned in our Montessori training works for a child with atypical development, so we try that first. But sometimes the child may not progress as we would expect. Our observations as Montessori teachers will then need to be



Dr. Theodor Hellbrügge (1919-2014)

## Montessori materials are extremely versatile and powerful developmental tools

They are developmental aids and we know how to use them for typically developing children. If a child is not able to use them as presented, we do what Maria said to do: we observe and we experiment. We adapt our lesson so that the child can feel success. The presentation may be adapted for the depth of concept (for example, using three cubes instead of ten) or length of presentation (for example, just setting the lesson up and then putting it away). Do we need to break down the lesson into smaller lessons or create a precursor lesson? Do we need to give language along the way?

As soon as you see something—a child not following typical development—you need to pay attention. Observe. Ask a colleague to observe. You

## Collaboration, communication, and organization are enhanced through this work as "teacher"

supplemented by medical observations and perhaps evaluations to determine the sources of the child's developmental hurdles. Without the input of medical specialists, we cannot confirm the root causes that need to be addressed for the child to reach his/her developmental potential.

don't need a diagnosis to begin making individualized adaptations to the lesson procedure or materials. It doesn't hurt to try. We need to start early and keep at it. If the child continues to struggle or not progress, then meet with the parents and bring in the appropriate medical specialists for observation, evaluation, diagnosis and initiate the appropriate therapies to help the child. Don't wait, hoping the child to grow out of the difficulty, because precious early intervention windows will close.

## Schools should plan carefully for classroom makeup

There should be a diversity of children, like a tiny micro-community. By the same token, we shouldn't ever feel bad for spending more time with one child. Guides should go where they are needed. If we truly think that we can't meet the needs of a child, it would be because we already are serving the needs of other children who require more time and attention. It would not be because of the limitations of the child, it would be because of the limitations of the classroom community itself. Thus, ideally, there should not be more than 25 percent of atypically developing children in each classroom.

## Children want to learn from other children

If we support children working together, all children benefit. The child that needs help is the obvious benefactor, but let's not forget that working with someone helps to solidify your knowledge and provides social and emotional growth opportunities. Collaboration, communication, and organization

are enhanced through this work as "teacher." We as guides know this, but it's easy to forget because it's often easier to do something ourselves.

I came to the Inclusion course with a strong Montessori background and lots of experience working with children who aren't textbook cases. I found the course to be rigorous and intriguing and I walked away with clarity about what I can do to move this work forward. We are here to meet the needs of all children. Won't you help me with this very important work?

To learn more, come to the *Virginia Montessori Association 2019 Fall Conference—Inclusion: Preparing the Adults and Supporting the Children*, on November 16 at the University of Mary Washington. You can also visit the Montessori4inclusion online at [montessori4inclusion.org](http://montessori4inclusion.org).

*Trisha Willingham is the Student Support Coordinator at Mountaintop Montessori in Charlottesville, a Consultant for Great River School in St. Paul MN, and a founding board member and current President of the Virginia Montessori Association.*



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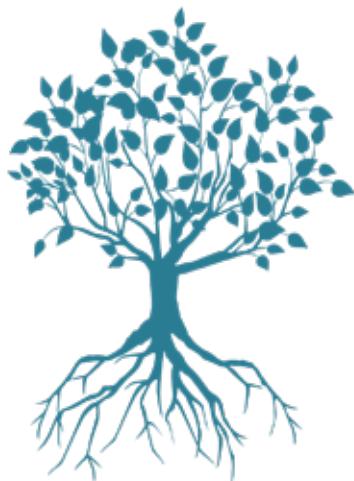
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# Creating peacemakers at Compass Montessori

**A teacher and a parent share their experiences with NVC in the classroom**



BY **CHRISTY CURTON** AND **JACEY TRAMUTT**

## Introduction—Jacey Tramutt

Non-Violent Communication (NVC) is a communication process and awareness discipline created by Marshall Rosenberg that I have been fortunate to teach in the elementary program at Compass Montessori, a charter school near Denver, Colorado, serving more than 400 children from age three through high school, with another parent volunteer, Mike Ambroziak. We have been supported by Christy Curton, my son's lower elementary classroom guide, who helped develop the curriculum and supports the use of NVC in her classroom.

The NVC process consists of four steps:

1. Observing without evaluating or judging
2. Expressing feelings
3. Connecting feelings to needs or values
4. Making requests

An essential element of NVC is equity—valuing our own needs and feelings equally to the needs and feelings of others. We are also viewing needs and feelings as universal human experiences, and because everyone experiences them, compassion arises naturally when they are effectively communicated. This is a key component to resolving conflict. From an NVC lens one can define power as the ability to get a need met. When children are struggling, it is often because they lack the power to get their needs met. Teaching children a language of feelings and needs levels the playing field at school, creating a safer and more connected community where everyone is valued.

Christy and I met over the summer last year to discuss our goals and implementation plan for teaching “Peaceful Communication.”

## Goals:

- To create a group of self-selected student leaders in the elementary program fluent in peaceful communication through small group instruction. This group created the name “Peacemakers.”
- To support other elementary students in learning the skill through a Peacemaker work on the classroom shelf, whole class instruction, and through interaction with Peacemakers.

## The Process:

There are 2 lower elementary classrooms at Compass (comprising 1st–3rd graders), and 2 upper elementary classrooms (for 4th–6th grade). All classrooms were given whole class instruction at the beginning of the year on

## When children are struggling, it is often because they lack the power to get their needs met

peaceful communication through the use of roleplays, as well as introduced to the peaceful communication work on the shelf. Students interested in becoming a Peacemaker were asked to fill out a short application. Parent consent for participation was attained and no student was turned away.

The work consisted of a binder with a giraffe on it (the giraffe is a symbol of NVC as it is the land animal with the largest heart) containing some tools from GROK the World, which publishes NVC support material, as well as teacher-developed peaceful communication worksheets and peace wheel spinner for resolving conflict,

The Peacemakers meet once a month to engage in activities to learn peaceful communication. Last semester each student made a peace wheel spinner. The wheel consists of six landing points: observation, feeling, need, request, other person's feeling, and other person's need. In addition, students also wrote up instructions for how to use the wheel to resolve conflict. The Peacemakers took their spinners home at the end of the semester, and one spinner was added to the giraffe binder for students to use in the classroom. A lesson was presented

to the elementary classrooms on how to use the peace wheels to resolve conflict.

## Classroom Observations—Christy Curton

The Peacemaker lessons have been a wonderful addition to our Montessori peace work and philosophy of Grace and Courtesy. Caring about others and basic respect for what others have to say are foundational grace and courtesy tenants, which this NVC work supports. They recognize that we all have feelings, and empathy can be seen when you realize someone has the same or similar feelings as you. Hearing a classmate say they feel frustrated can bring a sense of, “Oh, I know what that feels like”. Most children know what it feels like to need friendship, to need respect, to need belonging. And they can empathize with

a guide walk a first-year through the steps of saying how he feels and what he needs to a third-year. I have seen children take peace materials off the shelf and look through the GROK cards to choose a word that matches their feelings. This step (using the GROK cards) has brought great self-awareness to the children's feelings and helping them put those feelings into words.

I am grateful for the experience of observing the children as they go through this process and witnessing changes in the way the members of our community communicate with each other. I appreciate the observation step, as it has taken the judgment out of the equation when resolving difficulties. Over time, I have seen the benefits of the whole class hearing about NVC and the four steps for resolving difficulties. We all know the language to use and how it creates equity during difficulties. No matter our status, age, race, gender, etc., the language and the steps of this peaceful process builds tolerance in us all.

As we continue building this skill among the children we hope to see it take root and become the “normal” way of thinking and communicating; judgments of self and others replaced with observations, feelings and needs, demands replaced with requests. This creates a respectful learning environment, teaches a concrete conflict resolution process, cultivates empathy, and promotes equity among all students.

*Christy Curton is a lower elementary teacher at Compass Montessori in Golden, Colorado.*

*Jacey Tramutt is a Compass parent as well as a counselor and psychotherapist.*



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# Montessori for Social Justice in Portland

**6th annual event draws more than 350 participants**



BY **TAMIKA CROSS**

Montessori for Social Justice (MSJ) partnered with Harmony Montessori School to host its 6th annual conference in Portland, Oregon this summer.

arranged a special ceremony acknowledging Montessori Elders of the Global Majority, who helped pave the way for many current Montessori educators.

There were many “firsts” during the Portland conference! MSJ and Embracing Equity co-hosted an evening showcase event on Friday, June 21st called, “Speaking for Ourselves,” to promote the collaborative publication of the same title. The event showcased a select number of Montessorians who published poetry and other reflection pieces to read from the book to a live audience. Each conference attendee was able to receive the book as part of their registration. In addition to the readings, there

## The theme for the Portland conference was “Decolonizing the Human Potential”

This year’s theme was “Decolonizing the Human Potential”. More than 350 educators, school administrators, parents, social justice advocates, and volunteers convened on the Lewis and Clark College campus to learn, collaborate, and build social networks.

The MSJ conference began with two “pre-conference” affinity group gatherings that took place all day on June 20th. Participants could attend either Montessorians of the Global Majority or Decolonizing Whiteness retreats to experience deep, reflective preparation in self-identity work. The affinity group activities set the tone for the remaining days of the MSJ conference. In the following days, MSJ conference attendees were able to choose from 28 transformative breakout sessions, including one presented in Spanish, led by dynamic presenters from all over the North American continent. Our guest speaker, Robin Butterfield of the Winnebago/Chippewa Nation and President of the National Indian Education Association, gave an informative presentation on Guiding Principles in Teaching about Native Americans. The conference also



was a special dance performance choreographed by dance artist, Mr. Bobby Fother and his dance troupe, Big Foot Dreams, as well as a special greeting from Oregon Montessori Association’s Executive Director, Dalia Avello.

Throughout the days of the MSJ conference, there were a variety of wonderful additions! Once again, MSJ supported most meals, with the intention to highlight businesses of the Global Majority to cater on Saturday. There was a fun social event, accompanied with live music by Los Borikuas. There were 11 vendors present for the conference, selling a variety of goods, Montessori materials, and information to share about their organizations. There were two days of general sessions that were focused on panel discussions, which included school and community leaders of the Global Majority from Oregon. Ten panelists were welcomed to the stage to share their stories and experiences regarding decolonizing Montessori education and building better community partnerships between Montessori programs and community organizations.

At the closing general assembly, MSJ acknowledged the outgoing founding MSJ board members Tiffany Jewell, Althea Miller, Amelia Allen, Daisy Han, and Trisha Moquino. The 2019-2021 Board of Directors welcomed D. Ann Williams and Tamika Cross.

Lastly, on behalf of the MSJ community we’d like to thank all of our sponsors, members and followers!

*Tamika Cross is the External Communications Director and a Board member for Montessori for Social Justice. She is the founder and director of Cross Montessori Angels (www.cross-montessoriangels.com).*

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## 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 going to look at two areas where Montessori has a lot of depth and a unique approach: Science and Math.

How are you implementing Montessori in your public classrooms within the constraints of state standards and testing? What have you learned?

**Research? Opinion?** Well-reasoned, clearly stated positions are interesting even if they're controversial. Say something strong and from the heart, backed up with a few strong statistics.

**Experienced writers only?** No! First-time writers and published authors alike have appeared in these pages.

**How long should it be?** 900-1,000 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 **December 30th**, 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](mailto:editor@montessoripublic.org)



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# The public calendar

- October 11-12** **South Carolina Montessori Alliance Annual Conference**  
USC CAMPUS, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA
- October 19** **Montessori Association of North Carolina**  
FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE: MONTESSORI FOR ALL!  
CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA
- October 19** **Montessori Consortium of the Great Lakes**  
SYMPOSIUM: FAMILY ENGAGEMENT  
SOUTH BEND, INDIANA
- October 25-26** **Public Montessori Educators of Texas Conference**  
ADVANCING EQUITY IN PUBLIC MONTESSORI  
AUSTIN, TEXAS
- November 1-2** **Wisconsin Montessori Association Annual Conference**  
MADISON WISCONSIN
- November 16** **Virginia Montessori Association 2019 Fall Conference**  
INCLUSION: PREPARING THE ADULTS AND SUPPORTING THE CHILD  
FREDRICKSBURG, VIRGINIA
- November 7-10** **International Montessori Foundation**  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE: CHANGING THE WORLD ONE CHILD AT A TIME  
SARASOTA, FLORIDA

## 2020

- January 11** **University of Wisconsin La Crosse Regional Montessori Conference: Celebrating Our Montessori Children**  
LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN
- February 14-17** **AMI/USA Refresher Course**  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON
- February 21-22** **Association of Illinois Montessori Schools (AIMS) Annual Conference**  
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
- February 28-March 1** **Montessori Educational Programs International (MEPI) Annual Conference**  
KIAWAH ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA
- March 12-15** **American Montessori Society (AMS) The Montessori Event**  
DALLAS, TEXAS

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

Deadline for the next issue: **December 30, 2019.**  
Be sure to include the date, organization, event title, city and state  
**Email to:** [editor@montessoripublic.org](mailto:editor@montessoripublic.org)



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