



**AMERICAN MONTESSORI SOCIETY**  
education that transforms lives

# **AMS School Accreditation Standards and Criteria**

*Effective July 1, 2018*

*Updated June 13, 2019 (Standard 5.2)*

*Updated March 30, 2020 (Standards 3.7.4, 5.1) and making required Standards 3.2.1, 3.3, 3.5.1, 3.5.2, 3.5.3, 3.5.4, 3.7, and 5.2 as baseline criteria for school accreditation.*

*Updated March 22, 2022 (Standard 5.3)*





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### SCHOOL ACCREDITATION STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

#### STANDARD 1: PHILOSOPHY, MISSION, AND VISION

The quality Montessori school's mission and vision are student-centered and guided by Montessori philosophy. The school establishes and communicates a shared philosophy that informs all facets of the school's culture, daily operations, and instructional decisions.

#### CRITERIA:

##### The quality Montessori school:

- 1.1 Creates written mission and vision statements with input from stakeholder groups.
- 1.2 Publishes a written non-discrimination policy that addresses race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), socio-economic level, physical ability or genetic information, and learning style.
- 1.3 Develops and updates a demographic profile of the school, its students and faculty/staff, and the community.
- 1.4 Communicates the mission and vision to build stakeholder understanding and support.
- 1.5 Reviews the school's mission and vision annually to ensure alignment with its educational goals and philosophy.
- 1.6 Has created and continues to foster a program, culture, and inclusive community of students, families, faculty and staff, and governing body (if applicable), that embraces diverse perspectives, cultures, backgrounds, and identities.



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### STANDARD 2: GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT – Strategic Plan

The quality Montessori school promotes student learning and school effectiveness through strong governance and leadership that is aligned with the school’s mission and vision. It establishes, implements, monitors, and refines a strategic planning process to demonstrate continuous improvement.

#### GOVERNANCE

##### CRITERIA:

##### The governing body...

- 2.1 Establishes written policies and procedures that provide for the operation of the school and for the short- and long-term sustainability of the governing body and school leadership.
- 2.2 Functions as the strategic, policy-setting body and delegates responsibility to the head of school/principal/executive director (“administrative leader”) for implementation of the strategic plan and all school operations.
- 2.3 Provides support to and evaluation of the administrative leader.
- 2.4 Provides an organizational chart that clearly defines roles, lines of authority, relationships, and accountability.
- 2.5 Is knowledgeable of and complies with applicable federal, state, and local laws, standards, and regulations. (If the school is exempt from licensing or compliance, written documentation verifying the exemption is required to be kept on school grounds.)
- 2.6 Adheres to all applicable laws and regulations related to the education of students with disabilities.

#### LEADERSHIP

##### CRITERIA:

##### The administrative leader...

- 2.7 Promotes a culture of participation, responsibility, and ownership.
- 2.8 Provides opportunities for collaboration among stakeholders to make the school's mission and vision a reality.
- 2.9 Seeks and responds to school community concerns in order to clarify expectations and to strengthen stakeholder commitment.
- 2.10 Institutes, publishes, and facilitates systems that promote consistency and continuity of the curriculum within and across program levels.
- 2.11 Employs a system that analyzes learner outcomes and school effectiveness.
- 2.12 Ensures oversight of curricular and extracurricular activities that are sponsored/offered by the school.

#### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT – Strategic Plan

##### CRITERIA:

##### The governing body together with school leadership:

- 2.13 Ensures that plans for continuous improvement are aligned with the mission and vision of the school and the expectations for student learning.



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- 2.14 Engages stakeholder groups in a continuous process of improvement that results in a written multi-year strategic plan.
- 2.15 Includes in its strategic plan the following: goal statements, person(s)/role(s) responsible for achieving the goal and/or assessing work toward the goal, and financial implications.
- 2.16 Uses its strategic plan to guide its work.
- 2.17 Annually monitors, evaluates, and updates in writing the progress made toward the goals outlined in the strategic plan.
- 2.18 Annually communicates the progress and results of improvement efforts to stakeholders.



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### STANDARD 3: TEACHING AND LEARNING – Educational Nature

A quality Montessori school implements a Montessori curriculum based on clear and measurable learner outcomes. Students actively engage in the learning process, exhibit joy in learning, and apply their knowledge and skills to real-world situations.

#### CRITERIA:

##### Montessori learning environment:

- 3.1 The quality Montessori environment:
  - 3.1.1 Includes programmatically appropriate furnishings (tables, chairs, etc.) of appropriate size and quantity.
  - 3.1.2 Is clean and orderly to promote student independence.
  - 3.1.3 Has accessible storage area(s) for students' belongings.
  - 3.1.4 Has a water source available as needed for independent student work.
  - 3.1.5 Allows for a variety of activities such as individual/group, floor/table, noisy/quiet, and active/sedentary.
- 3.2 Instructional Materials
  - 3.2.1 Required for Accreditation**

Classroom environments are equipped with the fundamental Montessori materials. Curriculum support materials that meet the needs of the student may be incorporated into the classroom, provided that they do not replace the primary use of the Montessori materials.

*A list of fundamental and other suggested materials for each age level is provided in the AMS School Accreditation Handbook. This guides quality Montessori schools in preparing and assessing environments and selecting materials for each age level.*
  - 3.2.2 Classroom materials are aesthetically displayed and appropriately accessible to students.
  - 3.2.3 Classroom materials are purposefully sequenced (generally left-to-right, top-to-bottom) according to the school's scope and sequence.
  - 3.2.4 Schools inspect and evaluate materials regularly for completeness and good working condition, and keep a school-wide inventory of all instructional materials and furnishings, including a repair and replacement plan.

##### Montessori learning relationships

##### 3.3 Required for Accreditation

The school structures classes with Montessori multi-age groupings.\* Program levels must be structured and staffed for the following multi-age groupings:

- Infant: within the range of birth – 18 months
- Toddler: within the range of 15 – 36 months
- Early Childhood: a 3-year age group within the range of 2.5 years – 6 years
- Lower Elementary: 6 years – 9 years
- Upper Elementary: 9 years – 12 years
- or Elementary I – II: ages 6 years to 12 years
- Secondary: the school must offer an age grouping of either 12 – 14, 14 – 16, 16 – 18 years of age or 12 – 15, 15 – 18 years of age.



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A “bridge” program between Toddler and Early Childhood does not satisfy this criterion.

*\*Schools with a multi-age grouping variance listed in the document “Grandfathered Multi-Age Grouping Variances 2014” (dated October 3, 2014) are grandfathered such that they may maintain the age-grouping(s) for which the variance was granted. The accreditation status of these schools must be noted in their listing on the AMS website and in all other AMS accredited school listings, as well as in the schools’ own marketing materials. The exact wording that must be used is: “Accredited with non-traditional Montessori age groupings.” Failure of a school to comply with this language will result in revocation of AMS accreditation.*

- 3.4 School administrators and educators shall ensure that students with disabilities are educated with their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent appropriate, utilizing push-in supports and programs wherever appropriate. Students with disabilities shall be removed from the regular classroom setting for the provision of instruction and/or services only when necessary and individually appropriate.

#### **Montessori learning activities**

- 3.5 *Curriculum Design and Implementation of Instructional Programs*

The school provides a comprehensive Montessori educational curriculum based on Montessori’s fundamental philosophy of the child and the Montessori planes of development, with clearly-defined learner outcomes. (See “AMS Montessori Program Characteristics Papers” in the *School Accreditation Handbook*.)

##### **3.5.1 Infant and Toddler (Birth – 3)**

###### **Required for Accreditation if program offered**

The Infant & Toddler curriculum is based on 6 integrated developmental areas: sensory and perceptual, cognitive, physical, gross and fine motor, self-help skills, and social/emotional development. The learning environment fosters freedom of movement, integrates daily routines, and provides experiences that develop a child’s growth and independence. Indicators of successful implementation include students engaging in daily activities based on their needs, capabilities, and interests.

##### **3.5.2 Early Childhood (2.5 – 6)**

###### **Required for Accreditation if program offered**

The Early Childhood curriculum integrates the core areas of Practical Life, Sensorial, Math, Language, Peace and Cosmic Education, and Cultural Subjects. The learning environment is student-centered and self-directed. It promotes the development of order, coordination, concentration, and independence. Indicators of successful implementation include students engaging in self-directed learning and completing cycles of work independently.

##### **3.5.3 Elementary I (6 – 9) and Elementary II (9 – 12)**

###### **Required for Accreditation if program offered**

The Elementary curriculum integrates the core subjects of Mathematics (including geometry and algebra), Biological and Physical Sciences, Technology, Language Arts and Literature, History, Physical and Political World Geography, Civics, Economics, Anthropology, Peace and Cosmic Education, Art, Music, Additional/World Language, and Physical Education. Individually-paced academic progress allows students to explore their interests and acquire the mastery of basic skills and knowledge. The learning environment is student-centered and designed to promote the development of organizational and time management skills, conflict resolution skills, concentration, independence, cooperation, and collaboration.



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Indicators of successful implementation include teacher guidance, assessment in planning in concert with student planning, monitoring, and assessing their own work, and demonstrating responsibility for their own learning and actions.

#### **3.5.4 Secondary I (12 – 14/15) and Secondary II (14/15 – 18)**

##### **Required for Accreditation if program offered**

In addition to the core curriculum areas of Math, Language Arts, Social Studies, Science, Additional/World Language, and Creative Arts, the Secondary curriculum includes opportunities for community service, career exploration, economic awareness, technology, peace and cosmic education, physical education, outdoor education, and field studies. The curriculum prepares students for post-secondary education or careers through self-construction, extensive self-reflection, and opportunities for leadership and personal responsibility. Personality integration and stewardship of the Earth and humanity are crucial elements of the curriculum. Students' independent decision-making, problem solving, community building, and application of learning indicate successful implementation of the curriculum.

3.6 The school publishes and follows a written scope and sequence, across all program levels within the school, which is communicated to all constituencies.

##### **3.7 Required for Accreditation at program levels offered**

The school provides uninterrupted work periods of a length appropriate to the age of students served, to support student learning. (See “The Montessori Uninterrupted Work Period” in the *School Accreditation Handbook*.)

3.7.1 Infant & Toddler: The school allocates and protects, at minimum, a daily 2-hour work cycle. The time block allows for adult-assisted mealtime, snacks, hygiene, and nap/rest routines.

3.7.2 Early Childhood: The school allocates and protects, at minimum, a 2-hour work cycle, 4 days per week. A 3-hour uninterrupted work cycle, 5 days per week is optimal.

3.7.3 Elementary: The school allocates and protects, at minimum, a 2-hour work cycle, 4 days per week. A 3-hour uninterrupted work cycle, 5 days per week is optimal.

3.7.4 Secondary: The school allocates and protects, at minimum, a 90-minute work cycle for core curricular subjects (math, English, history or humanities, sciences, and additional world language/s).

3.8 The school does not schedule enrichment programs, group snack, whole-group lessons, recess, and transition times during uninterrupted blocks of student work time.

#### **Montessori spirituality**

The quality Montessori school...

3.9 Implements a curriculum that encourages the realization of Montessori's vision of a peaceful world.

3.10 Creates and follows policies that speak to the social and emotional health of the students.

3.11 Engages students in environmental stewardship and sustainability activities to foster Montessori's vision of maintaining the planet.

#### **What the Montessori teacher is**

The Montessori teacher is...

3.12 One who demonstrates knowledge and internalization of the core beliefs of Montessori philosophy, such as respect for the individual learner; preparation of self and the environment; fostering independence, order and concentration in the student; respect for



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and recognition of sensitive periods, planes of development, intrinsic motivation of the student, and the absorbent mind.

- 3.13 One who demonstrates fundamental communication skills to support the social and emotional development of students and to communicate with parents about student's social/emotional and academic progress.

#### **What the Montessori teacher does**

The Montessori teacher...

- 3.14 Designs and uses instructional strategies, innovations, and activities that are observation- and research-based, meet student needs, and reflect Montessori best practice.
- 3.15 Promotes active involvement of students in the learning process.
- 3.16 Provides for a balance of uninterrupted, self-directed, self-teaching, and collaborative activities with the presentation of individual, small-, and large-group lessons.
- 3.17 Implements and keeps clear, written records of individual, small-, and large-group lessons and activities and uses a comprehensive record keeping system that accurately reflects each student's development.
- 3.18 Observes the overall classroom environment during individual lessons and records observations.
- 3.19 Supports students in assessing their work as developmentally appropriate.
- 3.20 Uses various methods of communication to discuss student development with parents.
- 3.21 Implements accommodations and interventions to help students meet expectations for student learning, in consultation with school administrators and parents.
- 3.22 Recognizes and provides opportunities for students to participate in meaningful, age-appropriate leadership activities.



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#### STANDARD 4: DOCUMENTING AND USING RESULTS – Learner Outcomes

The quality Montessori school enacts an ongoing assessment system that monitors and documents learner outcomes, and uses these results to improve educational effectiveness.

#### CRITERIA:

**In a quality Montessori school, the administrative leader, faculty, and staff collaboratively...**

- 4.1 Determine written benchmarks across all program levels that indicate progress toward the following learner outcomes: academic preparation, autonomy and independence, confidence and competence, global citizenship, intrinsic motivation, social responsibility, and spiritual awareness/cosmic education.
- 4.2 Create, publish, and implement a data-driven system including qualitative (rubric-based) and quantitative measures (as appropriate to the age level) to assess student progress toward the established learner outcomes.
- 4.3 Analyze this recorded data, action research, and classroom observations to examine each student's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development.
- 4.4 Use the analysis of this data to make curricular and instructional decisions for individual students.
- 4.5 Evaluate school-wide effectiveness in meeting established benchmarks using compiled student data.
- 4.6 Use the results of a systematic analysis of instructional effectiveness to drive continuous improvement of teaching and learning processes.



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#### STANDARD 5: PERSONNEL

The quality Montessori school has policies and practices in place to ensure that employees are well qualified and are assigned professional responsibilities based on their qualifications (i.e., professional preparation, ability, knowledge, and experience). Employees are provided support through ongoing evaluation and professional development and are sufficient in number to support the school's mission and vision. The school states and follows fair, ethical, and non-discriminatory employment practices.

#### CRITERIA:

The quality Montessori school...

- 5.1 Employs an administrative leader who has professional qualifications that meet state and local regulations, as applicable.  
*\*Emerging criterion effective July 1, 2020: Administrative leader (head of school/principal/executive director) holds a bachelor's degree and qualifies with the minimum number of points required in the Head of School Requirements Verification, or has an approved portfolio variance. All Administrative leaders hired after July 1, 2020 must hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree or equivalent. All existing employed Administrative Leaders without a bachelor's degree may remain continuously employed at their current school in their current position in perpetuity.*
- 5.2 **Required for Accreditation**  
Employs lead teachers\* who hold a credential for the level they are teaching issued by an AMS, NCME, or AMI teacher education program, or any other MACTE-accredited course (or who are enrolled and in good standing in a qualifying Montessori teacher education program) and qualify with the minimum number of points required in the Teacher Requirements Verification form. In addition, lead teachers must meet all applicable requirements of the state or territory in which they teach.  
*\*Emerging criterion effective July 1, 2020: Instructors of the core subjects of math, English, history or humanities, and sciences, who work with students ages 12 - 18, will be required to have the appropriate, qualifying Montessori credential, i.e., Secondary I or I-II.*
- 5.3 Employs Elementary and Secondary lead teachers who hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited college/university in the U.S., a degree that is deemed to be equivalent, or one that meets the nationally recognized post-secondary educational standard in the state, province, or country of issuance as determined by a recognized U.S. credentialing agency (i.e., a credentialing agency that is a member of National Association of Credential Evaluation Services).  
It is highly recommended that all Infant & Toddler and Early Childhood lead teachers hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree or equivalent as stated above.
- 5.4 Provides written employment agreements for all school personnel annually, including compensation, benefits, and terms of employment.
- 5.5 Follows a written school-wide faculty salary scale that recognizes credentialing, education, and years of service.
- 5.6 Provides written job descriptions for all positions within the school.
- 5.7 Provides an employee handbook that includes, but is not limited to, the following: AMS code of ethics, an organizational chart, a non-discrimination policy, an anti-harassment statement (including sexual harassment), a discipline policy, description of employee conduct expectations, a grievance procedure, and a policy and procedure for termination.
- 5.8 Engages in annual staff training on written policies and procedures in employment handbook, including non-discrimination and anti-harassment policies.



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- 5.9 Ensures that all administrative and teaching staff document plans for completion of a minimum of ten (10) hours per year of professional development, which includes a minimum of one (1) hour of continuing professional development per year regarding the education of students with disabilities.
- 5.10 Ensures that all non-credentialed employees receive an orientation to Montessori philosophy and practice.
- 5.11 Ensures that the head of school and 100% of credentialed lead teachers maintain active membership in the American Montessori Society.
- 5.12 Implements an annual evaluation system that sets goals for professional growth for all teaching and administrative personnel.
- 5.13 Provides dedicated planning time for lead teachers on a weekly basis.
- 5.14 Maintains ratios of students to adults as appropriate for the age level:
- |                                      |      |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Infants (Birth – 18 months):         | 4:1  |
| Toddler (15 – 36 months):            | 8:1  |
| Early Childhood (2.5 – 6 years):     | 15:1 |
| Elementary (ages 6 – 12 years):      | 20:1 |
| Secondary I (ages 12 – 14/15 years): | 20:1 |
| Secondary II (ages 14 – 18)          | 25:1 |
- 5.15 Assigns at least one Montessori credentialed lead teacher at the age level to meet the following maximum student/adult ratios:
- |                                      |        |
|--------------------------------------|--------|
| Infants (Birth – 18 months):         | 10:1   |
| Toddler (15 – 36 months):            | 16:1   |
| Early Childhood (2.5 – 6 years):     | 30:1   |
| Elementary (ages 6 – 12 years):      | 30:1   |
| Secondary I (ages 12 – 14/15 years): | 50:1*  |
| Secondary II (ages 14 – 18)          | 100:1* |

*\*In Secondary programs that utilize a departmental model in which credentialed lead teachers teach multiple sections of a core subject (math, English, history or humanities, sciences, and additional world languages), each lead teacher shall have a total student caseload no higher than stated above.*



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#### STANDARD 6: FACILITY RESOURCES

The quality Montessori school provides facilities, sites, and equipment that meet optimum health and safety standards conducive to a safe learning environment in alignment with the mission of the school.

#### CRITERIA:

##### The quality Montessori school:

- 6.1 Certifies that the facilities meet all applicable federal, state, and local laws, standards, and regulations including, but not limited to, building codes and safety standards as required by local and civil authorities and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 6.2 Provides and maintains a site, facilities, services, equipment, and furnishings to ensure a safe environment for all occupants. Evidence of mandated safety protocols are provided in the form of completed health, fire, playground and/or other inspections.
- 6.3 Provides and maintains a site, facilities, services, equipment, and furnishings that support the school's instructional and co-curricular programs, which includes consideration of light, ventilation, and temperature.
- 6.4 Has written policies for the access to and use of the school site and facilities by individuals or groups outside of school hours with provision for adequate legal protections.
- 6.5 Has facilities that are adequate for developmentally-appropriate gross motor activity including space for safe, vigorous physical activity.
- 6.6 Has accessible, neat storage for teacher materials.



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#### STANDARD 7: FINANCES & STABILITY

The quality Montessori school maintains strong and prudent financial management practices and adequate fiscal resources to support its mission and vision.

#### CRITERIA:

##### The quality Montessori school...

- 7.1 Complies with all federal, state, and local regulations, as required by the school's legal status, and is verified by the AMS Independent Accounting Questionnaire.  
*\*It is the school's responsibility to be aware of all these laws and regulations and to take steps to be and remain in compliance. It is not the responsibility of AMS or the Visiting Team to independently verify compliance. Accreditation by AMS is not certification of a school's compliance with applicable laws and regulations.*
- 7.2 Monitors all financial practices and transactions by engaging an external accounting firm or certified individual annually to review and report on the school's financial practices and financial status through one of these recognized accounting services: review, compilation, or audit.
- 7.3 Develops an annual operating budget that is approved by the governing body or owner.
- 7.4 Utilizes a system for accurately tracking and documenting revenue and expenses.
- 7.5 Reports on current year financial performance through the preparation of financial statements on a monthly or quarterly basis to the governing body or owner for oversight.
- 7.6 Clearly states and publishes financial responsibilities of parents (if applicable).
- 7.7 Maintains a written policy for managing, disbursing, and overseeing the allocation of funds awarded through its financial assistance program (if applicable).
- 7.8 Engages in financial planning for the long-term sustainability of the school.



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#### STANDARD 8: RECORDS, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

The quality Montessori school has appropriate documentation, training, and human resources to meet applicable federal, state, and local regulations, assure health and safety of faculty/staff and students, and enable all students to achieve expectations for student learning.

##### CRITERIA:

The quality Montessori school...

- 8.1 Develops and implements a published comprehensive health (physical and emotional) and safety plan, preventive/emergency preparedness plan, and crisis management plan.
- 8.2 Annually reviews, updates as needed, and shares with appropriate stakeholders the comprehensive health and safety plan, preventive/emergency preparedness plan, and crisis management plan. (Plans should reflect the date of the most recent review and/or revision.)
- 8.3 Ensures that staff are trained, as required by local and state authorities, to comply with all current local and state safety regulations, including provisions made to simulate events and practice the execution of health and safety policies and procedures.
- 8.4 Maintains records of scheduled, completed emergency drills.
- 8.5 Documents and reports student incident/accidents that occur during school hours.
- 8.6 Maintains insurance coverage: fire and extended coverage, comprehensive liability, workers' compensation, and director and officers' liability insurance (if applicable).
- 8.7 Creates and publishes policies and procedures for field trips and off-site events that provide for the safety of the students including proper chaperoning and procedures for use of commercial and/or private vehicle transportation.
- 8.8 Maintains and distributes to staff students' emergency, health, and academic records at the site of attendance:
  - 8.8.1 Ensures that all teachers, administrators, and appropriate staff members shall receive any and all necessary information about a student's disability-related needs, which may include a copy of a student's specialized education program, to ensure that disability-based accommodations and specialized instruction occur consistently throughout the student's day.
  - 8.8.2 Provides a plan regarding retention of student records upon closing of the school that abides by state or local regulations.
- 8.9 Maintains on file and provides to families of students with disabilities, as necessary or requested, a list of professional support services and agencies in the community that are able to assist students with disabilities and families of students with disabilities.
- 8.10 Assists families in establishing connections with agencies, programs, and/or community resources that may be beneficial to the students with disabilities and/or their families.
- 8.11 Maintains employee records including Montessori credentials, licenses, teaching certificates, transcripts, evaluations, and background checks.
- 8.12 Has a policy for maintaining and backing up student, former student, and employee records and business files in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws.
- 8.13 Ensures accessibility to all legal documents as required by federal state and local laws/regulations befitting the school's legal status.



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#### STANDARD 9: STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

The quality Montessori school fosters effective communications and relationships with and among its stakeholders.

##### CRITERIA:

##### The quality Montessori school...

- 9.1 Has formal channels described and outlined in a policy and procedures document to listen to and communicate with stakeholders.
- 9.2 Publishes a parent handbook that articulates policies and procedures relevant for students and families, including an anti-bullying statement, a student discipline policy, and a grievance procedure.
- 9.3 Solicits the knowledge and skills of stakeholders to enhance the work of the school.
- 9.4 Communicates, through multiple channels, the expectations for student learning, learner outcomes, school effectiveness, and goals for improvement to all stakeholders.
- 9.5 Provides the necessary tools that enable outreach and engagement to the school's families, including those whose first language is one other than the primary language spoken in the school.
- 9.6 Conducts annual assessments of school effectiveness with constituents, and analyzes and shares results.
- 9.7 Develops a written observation policy and encourages visits by parents and other community members.
- 9.8 Practices community engagement by providing information about school programs, and seeks ways to contribute locally.
- 9.9 Provides family support and enrichment opportunities such as workshops on Montessori philosophy and curriculum, parenting issues, child development, and health and safety issues.