

What Makes a School Montessori?

A Master's Paper

Submitted by

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Abstract

In the spring of 2014, a public Midwestern elementary Montessori charter school governance board president along with other governance board members set out on a journey of discovery. They began by inviting the staff into deep conversations regarding the trajectory of the school. The result of this meeting was a desire for all stakeholders to come to a consensus as to the Montessori identity of the school. To begin this process, the staff considered the following questions.

- 1. What are the most important tenets of a Montessori education to you?*
- 2. What currently occurs at the school that supports a Montessori education?*
- 3. What currently occurs at the school that inhibits a Montessori education?*

This study looks at staff input, as well as that of parents, through the use of collaborative meetings and a survey. It further considers the impact on students of adhering more closely to one of the tenets by pre- and post-implementation observation. Creating more uninterrupted work time was the plan. When weather, state-mandated assessments, parent/teacher conferences, and holidays rendered it impossible to control scheduling in the desired fashion, anecdotal records told the story of children's fragile confidence and the empowerment time offers.

Introduction

In the spring of 2014, a public Midwestern elementary Montessori charter school governance board president along with other governance board members set out on a journey of discovery. They began by inviting the staff into courageous conversations (Singleton & Linton, 2006) regarding the trajectory of the school. The staff received copies of the governance board's 2013-2016 strategic plan which was created in response to public charter contract negotiations with the public school district during the 2012-2013 school year. On June 3, 2014, a combined meeting of governance board and staff members took place with the goals of reviewing the plan and receiving updates on its implementation, as well as considering staff input regarding those implementations and next steps toward joint goals. The result of this meeting was a desire for all stakeholders to come to a consensus as to the Montessori identity of the school.

Over the summer of 2014, the governance board asked staff to answer the following questions in preparation for the first identity meeting.

1. What are the most important tenets of a Montessori education to you?
2. What currently occurs at the school that supports a Montessori education?
3. What currently occurs at the school that inhibits a Montessori education?

Staff met on August 22, 2014 to discuss and prioritize their answers to these questions with the facilitation of a non-stakeholder hired for this purpose. The following areas surfaced as staff's important tenets of a Montessori education.

1. The Great Period: 3-hour uninterrupted work cycle
2. The Three Freedoms

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- a. movement,
 - b. choice,
 - c. repetition
- 3. Follow the Child
 - a. Differentiated instruction
 - b. Meet the child where he/she is
 - c. Small group or individual presentations
- 4. Materials
 - a. Montessori
 - b. Hands-on
- 5. Normalization
 - a. Self-regulation/Self-control
 - b. Time management
- 6. Multi-age Classroom
- 7. Teacher as Guide
- 8. Prepared Environment
 - a. Beautiful
 - b. Indoor/outdoor
 - c. Reflects real life
 - d. Shapes the child
- 9. Independence of the child
- 10. Whole child
- 11. Going Out: field trips that become increasingly child-led

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12. Peace education
13. Early education: Children's House includes 3 to 5-year-olds
14. Academic freedom: Autonomy of staff to determine best practices for the school
15. Respectful environment
16. The Great Lessons (Bourne):
 - a. First Great Lesson: Coming of the Universe and the Earth
 - b. Second Great Lesson: Coming of Life
 - c. Third Great Lesson: Coming of Human Beings
 - d. Fourth Great Lesson: Communication in Signs
 - e. Fifth Great Lesson: The Story of Numbers
17. Spiral Curriculum
18. Sensitive Periods
19. Community building
20. Observation of students as the primary method of assessment

At this point, individual staff members were directed to choose their top four priorities. From this process, six areas stood out as the essential elements of the school's identity from the perspective of staff.

1. The Great Period
2. The Three Freedoms
3. Follow the Child
4. Normalization
5. Prepared Environment

6. Montessori and other hands-on materials

These were not further prioritized or ranked in any particular order.

Literature Review

The first time I had the opportunity to observe a Montessori Children's House classroom, "organic" was the overall impression upon my heart and mind. What was it that so impacted me? What elements came together which to me equated "organic"? What makes a school Montessori?

The heart of the Montessori classroom is its teacher (Donahoe, 2013). She has prepared herself through careful study of Dr. Montessori's writings, materials, and methods. The ideal Montessori teacher is a master at the arts of observing (Pope Edwards, 2003; Powel, 2001) and reflecting (Huxel, 2013). Time is of the essence to her. She must give the child the time to do the work of constructing himself; she must give herself the time to observe and reflect on each child. The exemplary teacher has a deep reverence for both the child's work and her own for each is a delicate system in a process of continual rebirth (Huxel, 2013). She must not upset the balance of involvement and letting go. She thoughtfully prepares the environment and is at peace with herself, spirit, mind, and body, bringing that peace into the environment like a beautiful but subtle perfume. She is there as a guide, nothing more (Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, 1965).

It is necessary for the teacher to guide the child without letting him feel her presence too much, so that she may be always ready to supply the desired help,

but may never be the obstacle between the child and his experience (Montessori, Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook, 1965, p. 131).

The Montessori classroom environment must consist of six features (Polk Lillard, 1972, p. 51).

The first feature is freedom (Montessori, Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook, 1965). If we are to guide a child, we must be able to observe her in an environment where she is free to develop via her own inner individualized plan, free to move about the environment, free to choose her work, free to repeat the work (Polk Lillard, 1972; Pope Edwards, 2003; Powel, 2001). Secondly, a Montessori classroom must have structure and order. This will aid the children in developing an internalized order from which to operate productively. The classroom's configuration recognizes and honors the mathematical mind of the child (Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 1967).

Another component is a focus on reality and nature. Children should be engaged with real materials (e.g., glass trays, carrots that need peeling for snack, child-sized furniture) (Lillard A. , 2008) and have opportunities to interact with nature through plant and animal care. Fourth, beauty and atmosphere play an important role in the environment. From her early work in the asylums and slums of Rome, Montessori noted and became sensitive to the fact that our minds search for beauty and an atmosphere that promotes positive/optimistic thinking (Polk Lillard, 1972, p. 59). Montessori's sensorial materials are another key piece of the learning environment (Huxel, 2013). Each material offers an isolated concept that develops from simple to complex and concrete to abstract with built in control for error and acts as a stepping stone to future learning (Lillard A. , 2008). Finally the environment must offer the opportunity for the development of community life. The child-centered furnishings, mixed-age groupings, and

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freedom with responsibility foster community within a Montessori classroom (Polk Lillard, 1972).

The process of normalization was observed by Paula Polk Lillard. “First, the children’s cycle of repetition, concentration, and satisfaction would begin. It would lead to a development of inner discipline, self-assurance, and preference for purposeful activity. It appeared to [Montessori], in fact, to be the normal state of the child, since it developed spontaneously when the environment offered the necessary means” (Polk Lillard, *Montessori: A Modern Approach*, 1972, p. 8).

Characteristics of a normalized child include (Standing, 1957, pp. 175-178):

1. A love of order
2. Love of work
3. Profound spontaneous concentration
4. Love of silence and of working alone
5. Sublimation of the possessive instinct (The desire for knowledge, understanding, love, and service replace the desire for possession of an object (Schmidt, 2009).)
6. Obedience
7. Independence and initiative
8. Spontaneous self-discipline
9. Joy

In March of 2002, the American Montessori Society gathered a group of educational experts, both Montessorians and non-Montessorians, to determine the efficacy of Montessori education in modern times, post-2000 (Loeffler, 2002). They began by looking for the essences of Montessori

education. This group found that the ultimate focus of all Montessori education is normalization (called valorization after Children's House). Montessori herself wrote, with emphasis,

It is the most important single result of our whole work. The transition from one state (deviation) to the other (normality) always follows a piece of work done by the hands with real things, work accompanied by mental concentration (Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, 1967, p. 204).

The 2002 cohort postulated that normalization includes four traits:

1. the ability to concentrate,
 2. the need and enjoyment of meaningful activity or work which led to competence and independence,
 3. the ability to evidence self-discipline or self-regulation,
 4. sociability or the desire to be a responsible and contributing member of a community
- (Loeffler, 2002).

Upon close comparison, these four traits are a consolidation of the nine defined by Standing in 1957.

Montessori observed that adults view work differently from children. E. M. Standing in his book *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work* pointed out that if someone volunteered to do a man's work of shoveling sand, he would gladly accept. Given the same offer, a child would not only decline but would shovel until his wheelbarrow was full and then empty it and fill it again

repeatedly (Standing, 1957, pp. 141-142). For the typical adult, this appears to be a horrendous waste of time. For the child, as Montessori said,

He is following the timetable like the most diligent scholar in the world – following it with the unshakable constancy of the stars in their courses (Standing, 1957, p. 145).

Standing went on to compare a normalized child's work to that of a mystic deep in thought or an artist creating a masterpiece (Standing, 1957, p. 146). She will not be hurried and it is counterproductive to attempt to rush her. Consequently, an important feature of the Montessori experience is The Great Period, an uninterrupted 3-hour work cycle (Pope Edwards, 2003; Roemer, 2013; Selman, 2003).

Another researcher, Jacqueline Cossentino (Cossentino, *Ritualized Expertise: A Non-Montessorian View of the Montessori Method*, 2005), a self-labeled non-Montessorian, used the “lens of ritual” to examine the Montessori method. Cossentino found that concentration, coordination, independence, order and respect are the hallmarks of the Montessori method. She saw these being established through:

1. the prepared environment, specifically the limitation of one set of materials available per work,
2. the ritual of presentations given in prescribed ways,
3. the sequence of presentations within the curriculum,

4. the love shown by Montessori guides. This she points out is a concept very much lacking in other “best practices” where theorists avoid the subject because of its political implications.

As a result of my experiences at the school, combined with this review of current and historic literature, I have begun to ponder several questions. Specifically: **What do the various stakeholders of the school identify as making it uniquely Montessori?** Stakeholders include: staff, students, parents, charter school governance board, and school board. In addition:

1. In what ways do the stakeholders agree regarding the Montessori identity of the school?
2. In what ways do the stakeholders disagree regarding the Montessori identity of the school?
3. Are some stakeholders lacking information?
4. What obstacles does the staff face in striving for their ideal?
5. What is within the power of the staff to change or improve?
6. What is one change I can make in my classroom to support what the school community views as uniquely Montessori?

Methodology

Participants & Setting

The participants of the survey portion of this study included the staff and parents from a public Midwestern elementary Montessori charter school with a student population of 280. The school has three Children’s House classrooms with a total of eighty 4 to 6-year-olds. Each of these classrooms has a full-time teacher, a half-time teacher, and a full-time classroom assistant.

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Children are able to attend Children's House for two school years. First year 4-year-olds attend mornings five days per week. The remainder of the student body attends full-time. The school has six Elementary 1 (E1) classes, two of which are housed within one classroom. These classes consist of 6 to 9-year-olds. E1 students remain with the same teacher for a full three-year cycle. Each class has one full-time teacher. In addition, the six classes share support from two classroom assistants. Finally, the school has three Elementary 2 (E2) classrooms consisting of 9 to 11-year-olds. Each of these classrooms has a full-time teacher. The three classrooms share one full-time assistant. E2 students remain with their teacher for two years at which time they graduate from the school. Currently, the district's Montessori offerings end with E2.

The action research portion of this study took place within a Children's House classroom consisting of ten 4-year-olds, six boys and four girls, who attend mornings from 8:25 – 11:30 and sixteen 5-year-olds, seven boys and nine girls, who attend all day from 8:25 – 3:20. Of the 5-year-olds, two of the boys were first year students at the school, as were two of the girls. The remainder of the 5-year-olds attended the school as 4-year-olds in the same classroom. None of the children had Montessori school experiences prior to attending this school. The classroom is approximately 1,200 square feet with a full complement of Montessori materials. The full-time teacher in this classroom has taught in this Children's House since the school opened fourteen years ago. She has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a master's degree in Montessori early childhood education. The part-time teacher in this classroom has bachelor's degrees in speech, language and hearing sciences, deaf education, and elementary education. She is currently working towards a master's degree in Montessori early childhood education. The assistant in this classroom has a bachelor's degree in art with a concentration in pottery.

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Survey Procedure

Survey Monkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>) was used to create a survey for parents, the governance board, and the school board.

Montessori Identity: Parental Input

Welcome! Please review the following before you participate:

1 / 4 25%

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Janet Krause, Children's House Guide at [REDACTED] and graduate Early Childhood Montessori student at the University of Wisconsin – River Falls. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact Janet Krause at janet.krause@my.uwrf.edu or Dr. Gay Ward, Professor of Literacy and Early Childhood, at gay.ward@uwrf.edu.

Purpose
The purpose of this research is to create a baseline of the collective Montessori identity within the [REDACTED] community. It is hoped that this data will further support collaborative discussions and planning, as well as a greater awareness of the unique contribution of [REDACTED] within the [REDACTED] School District.

Your Participation
If you decide to participate, you will be asked to respond to 3 questions. It is estimated that completion of this survey will take approximately 10 minutes.

Confidentiality
Your responses are strictly anonymous. Your identity will in no way be associated with your responses.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation is voluntary. If you agree to participate, you may choose not to answer any given question and/or discontinue your participation at any time.

Thank you for your contribution to this project.

Next

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Figure 1. Survey introduction

The screenshot shows a survey interface for 'Montessori Identity: Parental Input'. At the top, there's a dark blue header with the title. Below it, a light blue bar says 'School of Choice'. A progress bar indicates '2 / 4' questions completed, with a red bar showing 50% completion. The main question is '1. Why did you choose [redacted] School for your family?'. Below the question is a large text input box. At the bottom, there are 'Prev' and 'Next' buttons. The footer mentions 'Powered by SurveyMonkey' and provides a link to 'sample surveys'.

Figure 2. Question 1 (Parental input)

The screenshot shows a survey interface for 'Montessori Identity: Governance Board Input'. At the top, there's a dark blue header with the title. Below it, a light blue bar says 'School of Choice'. A progress bar indicates '2 / 4' questions completed, with a red bar showing 50% completion. The main question is '1. Why did you choose to become a member of the [redacted] School Governance Board?'. Below the question is a large text input box. At the bottom, there are 'Prev' and 'Next' buttons. The footer mentions 'Powered by SurveyMonkey' and provides a link to 'sample surveys'.

Figure 3. Question 1 (Governance board input)

Montessori Identity: ECASD School Board Input

Contribution

2 / 4 50%

1. What do you view as the most impactful contribution of ████CS to the ████SD?

Prev Next

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Figure 4. Question 1 (School board input)

Montessori Identity: Parental Input

Montessori Features

3 / 4 75%

2. What makes ████CS uniquely Montessori? You may include up to ten features.

Feature 1:

Feature 2:

Feature 3:

Feature 4:

Feature 5:

Feature 6:

Feature 7:

Feature 8:

Feature 9:

Feature 10:

Prev Next

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Figure 5. Question 2 (All audiences)

Montessori Identity: Parental Input

Montessori Terminology

4 / 4
100%

3. How familiar are you with the following Montessori terminology?

	This is the first time I've seen this terminology.	I have some idea of how this impacts my child(ren)'s education.	I could clearly explain this to someone who is unfamiliar with Montessori education.
The Great Period (Uninterrupted Work Cycle)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The Three Freedoms: Movement, Choice, Repetition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Follow the Child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Normalization (Executive Function)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Prepared Environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Montessori Materials	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Multi-age Classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher as Guide	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Practical Life Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sensorial Work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spiral Curriculum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sensitive Periods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grace & Courtesy Lessons	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Education of the Hand	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Children's House	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
E2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Prev
Done

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Figure 6. Question 3 (All audiences)

Classroom Procedure

The Great Period was the tenet chosen for stricter implementation. The hypothesis was: *Given a longer uninterrupted work period, children will develop deeper concentration, coordination,*

independence, order, and respect. They will demonstrate this by a decrease in wandering and interrupting behaviors.

The planned schedule for the first six weeks of the study was:

Time	Half-day Students	Full-day Students
8:25-8:45	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take off coat, etc. 2. Put on slippers 3. Bring name card to the name card box 4. Bring take-home folder to the folder basket 5. Choose a book to look at silently around the rug 	
8:45-9:00	Group story or songs	8:45-9:30 Special: (Physical Education, Art or Music)
9:00-10:30	Independent work and presentations	
10:30-11:00	Gather on the rug for story and/or group language work	9:30-11:00 Work/Presentations
11:00-11:15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Put folder in backpack 2. Put on going home shoes 3. Put on coat, etc. 4. Put on backpack 5. Sit in front of locker 	Gather on the rug for group culture presentations
11:15-11:30	Dismissal: Each child escorted to vehicle	

Figure 7. Daily schedule A

To gain an additional 30 minutes of work time, the planned schedule for the second six weeks of the study was:

Time	Half-day Students	Full-day Students
8:25-8:35	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take off coat, etc. 2. Put on slippers 3. Bring name card to the name card box 4. Bring take-home folder to the folder basket 5. Go to work 	
8:35-10:45	Independent work and presentations	8:45-9:30 Special: (Physical Education, Art or Music)
10:35-11:00	Gather on the rug for story and/or group language work	9:30-11:00 Work/Presentations
11:00-11:15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Put folder in backpack 2. Put on going home shoes 3. Put on coat, etc. 4. Put on backpack 5. Sit in front of locker 	Gather on the rug for group culture presentations
11:15-11:30	Dismissal: Each child escorted to vehicle	

Figure 8. Daily schedule B

In addition to anecdotal notes, data was collected by the half-time teacher at random times (following each presentation) by tallying:

1. Number of wandering students

2. Number of students interrupting other students' work

Results and Discussion

Survey

During conversation with the school's principal, it was decided that the timing was not good for surveying the school board. Because of technical difficulties, the governance board survey results were incomplete.

Given the parental survey, 124 parents completed the survey out of 351 invited via email. This is a response rate of 35%. The first question on the parents' survey asked, **“Why did you choose this school for your family?”** and was answered by 123/124 respondents. A complete list of responses can be found in Appendix B. Unexpected responses to the first question included:

- I didn't. I don't live in the state.
- No.
- And we love Miss Janet.

A large majority of parents cited the Montessori Method as their primary reason for choosing the school. Other factors weighing heavily on decision making included recommendations from family and friends, as well as a desire for a nontraditional setting.

- We had heard wonderful things about the Montessori school from other parents and the community. We also really loved the Montessori approach to learning.
- Because the traditional school setting was not an environment my children could thrive in. Montessori was exactly what we were looking for.

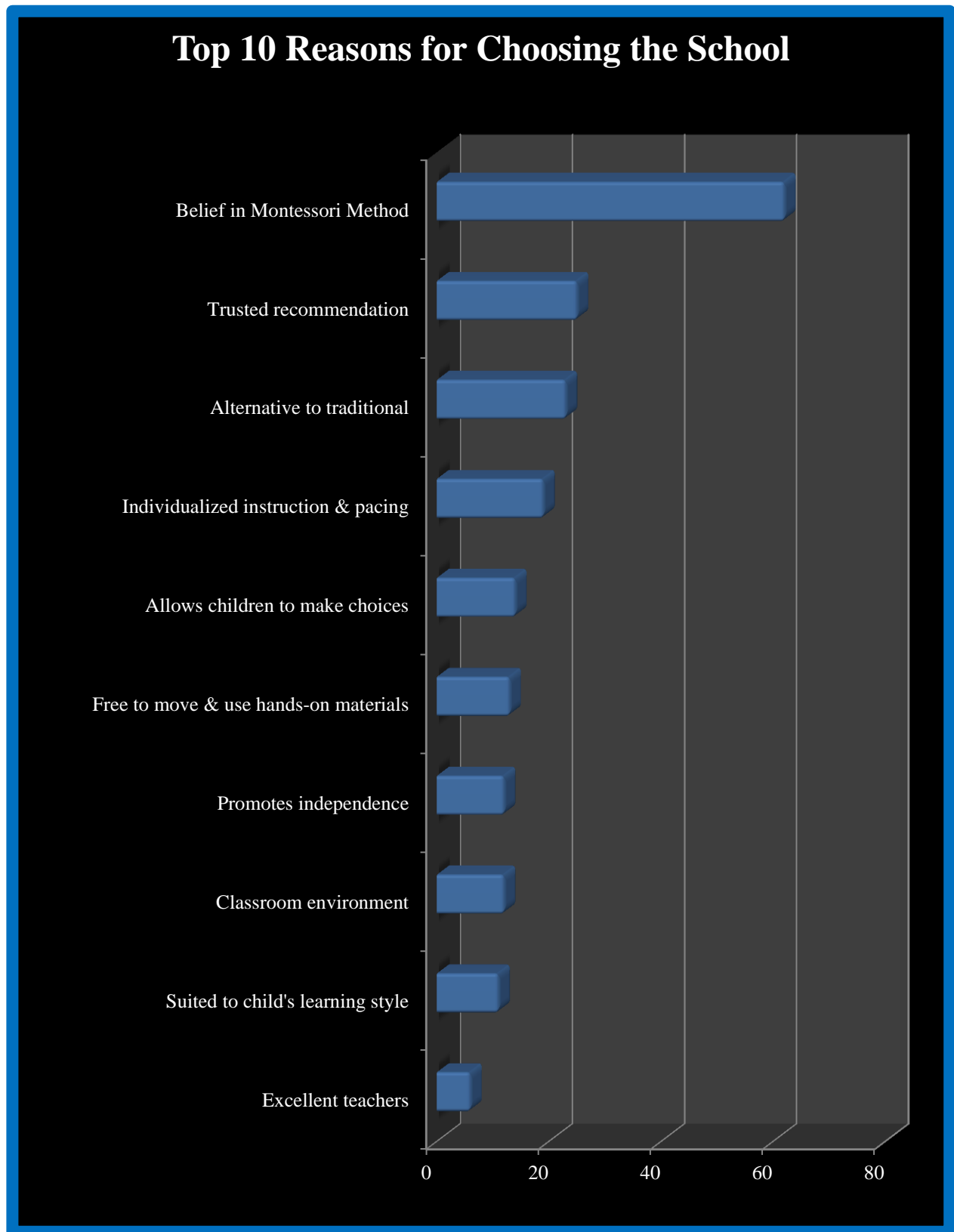


Figure 9. Reasons for choosing the school

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The second item on the survey stated, **“What makes this school uniquely Montessori? You may include up to ten features.”** This item was completed by 108/124 respondents.

Respondents	Number of Features
108	1
104	2
90	3
72	4
48	5
35	6
25	7
15	8
7	9
4	10

Figure 10. Unique features of this Montessori school

Unexpected response to the second question included:

- This question makes no sense to me.
- Reading over this survey I now refuse to take part. Thought needs to go into this. These are very poorly worded questions.

The most commonly noted features were the multi-age classrooms and individualized instruction and pacing. The unique qualifications of staff along with freedoms afforded the children were also referred to frequently.

- A healthy mix of ages in each class allows older children to solidify what they know by helping younger students
- Flexibility in the staff and a willingness to meet each child where s/he is at
- Not holding students back to meet a norm
- Highly engaged and Montessori trained staff
- Freedom to move around classroom
- The students get to choose their work

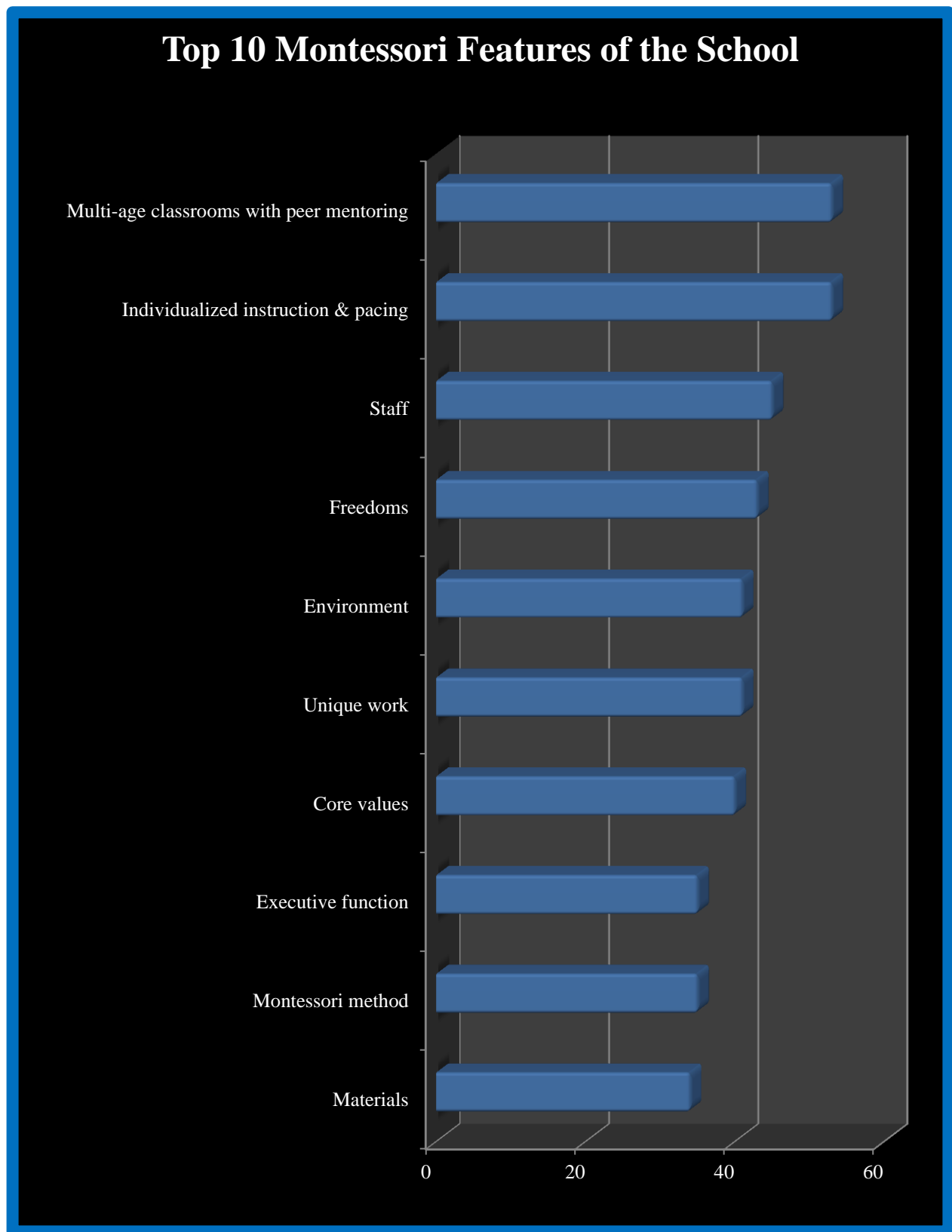


Figure 11. Montessori features of the school

The third item on the parental survey asked, “**How familiar are you with the following Montessori terminology?**” Again, 108/124 participants responded to this question.

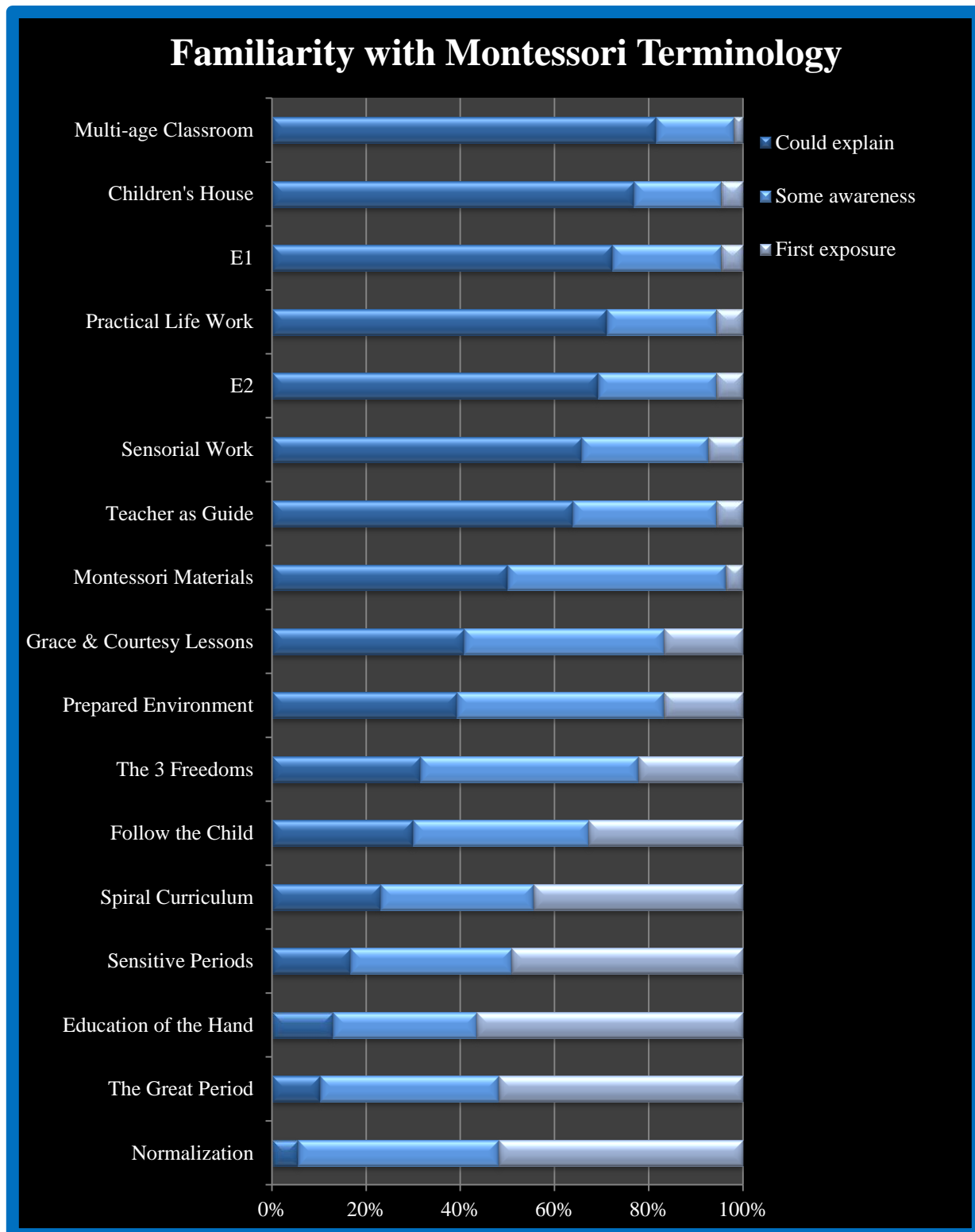


Figure 12. Familiarity with Montessori terminology

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Although parents indicated that they don't feel extremely familiar with Montessori terminology, their descriptions of features of the school indicated that they see this terminology in action.

Montessori Term	Parent Description
Follow the Child	Individualized instruction Individualized pace
The Three Freedoms	Children are free to: 1. Move 2. Make choices about their work 3. Repeat work as needed
Education of the Hand	Hands-on Montessori materials
The Great Period	Individual work time
Normalization	Children develop a love of learning. Children are independent. Children are respectful.

Classroom

During the first three weeks of data collection, the classroom schedule (Figure 7) was very inconsistent. Events that were out of the control of the guides affected the schedule several times each week. Examples of interruptions included rainy days where students came into the classroom early and went immediately to work resulting in the use of an extended version of schedule B (Figure 8) with some students going to work as early as 8:05 a.m., state-mandated testing resulting in a reduction of the number of typical presentations and an increase in teacher interruptions of student work, as well as schedule changes due to parent/teacher conferences,

staff development, and holidays. Looking ahead on the calendar, in addition to considering the unpredictability of our regional weather, it became clear that anecdotal notes would prove more enlightening than charting off-task behaviors observed during each type of schedule.

Schedule A (Figure 7)	Schedule B (Figure 8)
Children gathered around the perimeter of the rug with a cumulative effect.	Children dispersed throughout the room as they arrived.
Children focused on other children while waiting in line to choose books.	Children focused on choosing and doing work.
When conflicts arose, they tended to be among several children.	When conflicts arose, they tended to be between pairs of students.
When dismissed from group, one or more students often went directly to the helping chair (a place to sit and wait for adult assistance) or interrupted adults with statements such as “I don’t know what to pick.”	Children typically chose their work without asking for guidance. Most children became engaged and stayed engaged making it difficult to find a free child for a presentation.
Transitioning from group to independent work caused anxiety for some. “I didn’t get to finish my book!”	Going directly to work was exciting for some. “We get to go right to work!”

Figure 13. Comparison of behaviors

Although scheduling did not allow for well-controlled quantitative data to be collected, the qualitative data seemed to support a schedule where children self-direct their work from the very beginning of their day. (See Appendix D & Appendix E for specific examples.) When the day

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began with a focus on a group activity and/or an adult directed/supervised activity, the children appeared to struggle with transitioning to taking ownership of their work. Once the authority figure was established for the day, the children seemed to look to that authority for continued direction. When the children were given choice from the beginning of the day, they seemed to portrait confidence in their own ability to direct their learning for the day.

Action Plan

As a result of this study, I ponder more questions at a school and district-wide level.

- How will the governance board and school board members respond to the surveys?
- Would parent education regarding specific Montessori terminology and principles empower them? If so, in what ways?
- What methods of parent education are we currently using that parents find helpful?
- What new and creative, parent-friendly parent education strategies can we try?

Future surveys will help answer these questions and guide the school staff in planning informational opportunities regarding the school's core identity that are accessible and meaningful to all stakeholders. In the meantime, an identity committee consisting of two has continued to work toward consensus among staff as to the foundations and methods we believe to be essential to our collective identity.

At the Children's House level, I wonder.

- Would consistently beginning our day with independent work promote normalization?
- How soon in the year could we reasonably transition to this format?
- Have the other Children's Houses in the school observed similar behaviors?

These topics are terrific jumping off points as we plan for the coming school year. I intend to continue collaborating with my co-teacher and grade-level peers to further strive toward more completely understanding and embracing Dr. Montessori's work and unlocking the children's path to normalization.

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Appendix A: Permission Letter

Dear Families,

As part of my work toward a master's degree in Montessori Education, I am conducting an action research project. My research question is as follows:

What do the various stakeholders of our school identify as making us uniquely Montessori? Stakeholders include staff, students, parents, governance board members, and school board members.

Subsidiary Questions:

1. In what ways do the stakeholders agree regarding our school's identity?
2. In what ways do the stakeholders disagree regarding our school's identity?
3. Are some stakeholders lacking information?
4. What obstacles does our staff face in striving for our ideal?
5. What is within our staff's power to change or improve?
6. What is one change I can make in my classroom to support what the school community views as uniquely Montessori?

I would like your permission to share my classroom observations along with your child's input with my classmates as well as in other professional settings. All identifying information about your child will be kept confidential.

If you would like more information, please contact me at (715)852-4641 or jkrause@ecasd.us.

Sincerely,

Ms. Janet M. Krause
Children's House Guide

I give permission for my child to participate in the above described research project.

Child's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Responses to “Why did you choose this school for your family?”

1. Quality and type of educational experience for our children
2. I had read about the Montessori teaching practices and it just made so much sense for children to learn in best in these environments.
3. Thought it to be a unique and effective learning environment which instills independence and confidence.
4. I felt that Montessori would be the best option for my daughter's learning style.
5. We were unhappy with the other school that our daughter was attending. This school was an alternative where kids were treated with respect and afforded a great deal of responsibility.
6. Liked the style of learning. Can excel faster or can take more time. Not about one way to teach!
7. Traditional schools tend to provide a lesser quality education. Montessori Method treats children like people, and encourages common sense methods of learning and critical thinking skills. Montessori teaches kids to be functional members of society and possesses a unique, but common sense approach to learning. Kids tend to learn more effectively at Montessori. I have yet to see bullying and unruly behavior at the school.
8. I was looking for a smaller school to send my oldest to more than ten years ago, and talking with a friend who is a teacher decided this was the best fit.
9. The style of teaching
10. We loved the Montessori concept and wanted our child to learn at his own pace.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

11. I wanted the Montessori education for my family and as the school opened; my eldest son (who is now 19) seemed perfect to make the transition from the traditional classroom. We had a great experience and now my third child is graduating from the school this year.
12. We thought it was the best educational option for our children's learning. It fit with what is best for kids, not what is best for institutions, which we felt was the best option for our children and family.
13. I like their approach to teaching
14. We were familiar with the Montessori Method, and we thought it would be a great fit for our family, and for our children's learning/personality styles. We were beyond excited to find that we had access to a Montessori charter school, and we consider ourselves very, very fortunate to have such an opportunity available.
15. Amazing teachers and a Montessori based education
16. Like the style of learning.
17. We were impressed with how such young children could work so independently, while also remaining respectful of others. The kids we saw while we toured all seemed so polite and well behaved.
18. I like the way the teacher can adjust the activities to fit the child's strengths, i.e. combining art and math
19. Education format. Specifically we found the 4K/5K model to be a fantastic transition. Second, our kids have summer birthdays. We chose to have them be old rather than young for their grade, yet they are challenged academically in ways that are appropriate to them individually.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

20. the ability for faster progression if the student is ready and the focus on self-reliance and personal responsibility
21. I like the Montessori philosophy.
22. I liked the idea that it creates self-thinkers and provides choices instead of producing robots
23. A better education for my children where playing has an integrated role into learning. Unique opportunities in the learning environment for my children that would not be experienced in a standard classroom.
24. We were familiar with the Montessori model and wanted that for our children. Additionally, the school was at the top for % of children being at grade level for math, reading, etc. Feedback from other parents who sent their children there was positive.
25. We felt that Montessori offered a better environment for our kids to go to school.
26. I believe in the Montessori Method as being truly the best for kids.
27. It is the closest thing to homeschooling we could find & homeschooling isn't an option for our family. The level of education exceeds a traditional school setting in our opinion.
28. I didn't. I don't live in the state
29. Methodology of teaching.
30. Because of the particular learning styles of our children
31. Because the traditional school setting was not an environment my children could thrive in. Montessori was exactly what we were looking for.
32. We chose Montessori because we wanted our daughters to be engaged in learning. We wanted them to want to find answers in unique ways and to be able to demonstrate understanding of concepts in more than one way. A traditional classroom style does not

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

allow for exploration and the desire to pick what and when a child wants to learn and study.

33. Curriculum
34. Neighbors were taking their kids there so we did also
35. Because the different learning style works better for our children. And because bullying and bad behavior is better addressed than at other schools.
36. Felt it was a safer environment where our children are not held back because others may learn slower
37. No
38. It is more child-centered in learning goals.
39. We were looking for a place where our son could feel free to learn on his terms. We also like the method of teaching as well as the fact that every single person who worked/attended had made a conscious effort to send their child to the school - it means that everyone is really involved.
40. more rounded education
41. liked the methodology and mixed ages of classes along with high ratings for achievement
42. Opportunities for our child to choose interesting work, on their own pace. Multi-aged classrooms. Supportive family environment. Great word of mouth reputation.
43. The method being used to educate the students.
44. We believe in the educational philosophy supporting Montessori.
45. Wife heard from many moms (e.g. former teachers in public system) that was one of best options considering ability to learn at own pace and an alternative learning environment. Wife's college sister did service project there and thought "excellent choice." Two teacher

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

- friends walked through and thought this is "how school should be" and enrolled their daughters. Wife's mother said "closest thing to homeschooling." I trusted wife's research and also thought next best thing to private education or homeschooling
46. I loved the classrooms and how gentle and kind the teachers were. I liked that my son could be in a classroom with multiple grades
 47. Highly suggested by a few other families that we know. After the tour, we were blown away with the level of calmness and wanted that environment for our kids. Also, documentaries like Race to Nowhere made us stop and look at education differently. We want it to be important, but not THE THING... if that makes sense.
 48. I worked there and I loved the staff so much that I wanted my children to go to a school where the staff worked together cooperatively instead of competitively.
 49. Highly recommended by friends & family.
 50. My friends spoke highly of it. I was looking for the best education for my child and I respect the process at Montessori. She had best friends there.
 51. I believe that a Montessori education allows children the freedom of choice while allowing greater focus on areas of interest and support on areas of academia that are more challenging for the child.
 52. Impressed by the learning style at Montessori.
 53. We heard great recommendations from other families.
 54. I had heard great things about the school and wanted a place where my child could direct her own learning experience.
 55. Thought it was a good school with smaller class sizes

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

56. We were referred by a friend. We set up a visitation and ended up being so impressed by the classroom structure.
57. Our kids attended a Montessori school previously. We feel strongly that the Montessori Method is a better way of teaching.
58. Self-directed guided learning
59. Clearly, the Montessori school was the best option for our daughter with the small class size, high caliber teaching staff and proximity to our home.
60. We heard good things about Montessori
61. We value an alternative learning style. Not all kids learn in the same way. It really makes sense to us.
62. I was drawn to the freedom and independence in the Montessori philosophy.
63. Our child is very creative so I didn't want to enforce rigid teaching methods on her at an early age, but I needed to have her in a school setting due to family situation. The Montessori was a happy medium - some structure, but the freedom for her to grow.
64. After taking the tour I felt the learning environment would be good for both of my children.
65. "Progressive" approach to learning, & that the children are more responsible for their learning & for helping each other than "regular" schools.
66. A focus on independent learning.
67. We believe in the true teachings of Montessori and we're happy to discover that our city offered a curriculum that was at least in part based on the Montessori beliefs and practices. We would not have moved to the area otherwise

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

68. We were familiar with Montessori methods and had our child enrolled a Montessori school in our previous community.
69. I desired a holistic approach to education for my kids. I did a little research and really appreciated the concepts and theory behind Montessori education. After observing the Children's House I wanted my children to experience that type of early education and have the freedom to make choices and learn at their own pace.
70. We wanted an alternative to traditional education. We heard from friends that the Montessori was a great school.
71. Family recommended.
72. We read up on the differences between traditional education and Montessori education, and we felt that the Montessori philosophy would be more meaningful and effective for our child. We appreciate the individualized attention our child receives and the independence the curriculum cultivates in the students.
73. We liked the school environment, it offered an opportunity to start at the 4k level and continue in the same school through grade 5.
74. Children get a much rounder education. Hands on key.
75. I value the hands on learning style that nurtures children to learn by using all of their senses.
76. The Montessori Model and values are the same as our family's. We believe it gives children real life knowledge base that regular schooling isn't able to.
77. We wanted a different learning environment for our children.
78. We love the ability for each child to learn at their own pace and the overall environment at the school.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

79. The philosophy that focuses on independent learning and teamwork
80. We think it's better than traditional schools
81. We chose it for our student because it was a Charter school, and it was affordable (being a public Montessori school). In Chicago, all the Montessori schools were private and extremely expensive, so there was no possibility of our child attending. We also were familiar with the Montessori model of education and this seemed to be an excellent fit for the learning style of our student. Lastly, we knew a teacher and a staff member and several parents in the school, and heard from first-hand experience how fabulous it was! We were VERY lucky to get in through the lottery system. Many of our friends have tried for years without success in getting their children in. This school has always had a long waiting list.
82. We heard about the Montessori through friends. We like the teaching system they have
83. Different style of learning, possibility of challenging him beyond his peers (public school standards). His 4k teacher and pediatrician said it was what he needed as well. My tour showed me the environment I want my sons raised in, so it paralleled with our home/parenting style. While home schooling is not currently an option due to our finances, Montessori was the next best thing for us. I was elated to find out it was part of the public school system and no tuition was required. I have confidence in the majority of our school/principal/teachers/staff that they will always put our children and their safety and best interest first above all. And we love Miss Janet ;-)
84. My son is a very advanced reader at a very young age and his memory is excellent as well. We heard good things for a child like mine to keep advancing in a school like that instead of a public school.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

85. Not happy with school my kids were supposed to go to in the district. Liked Montessori approach and it was recommended by other parents.
86. it's style of teaching matched my daughters learning style
87. It has a perception of a smaller school. I grew up in a smaller community and like that aspect. Also I like the alternative teaching methods.
88. We felt that a Montessori education was the best learning style for our active boys.
89. Sent my daughter there for 4k, loved the teachers, program, philosophy etc. only wished I lived closer to make it our k-5 school too
90. I like the teaching style and I thought it would be a good fit for my child
91. The style of education is exceptional and makes a lifetime learner
92. We love the model as independent and specialized learning that is present in the Montessori classroom. Having two boys as our first children made us want to explore alternative education.
93. I felt the teaching methods were ideal for my children. Not as rigid and more open to explore and enjoy learning.
94. Had heard of Montessori success in other communities
95. I feel my daughter would not thrive on a sit at a desk all day environment
96. I attended a Montessori school as a child, and felt that the method has excellent results for children.
97. Love the concept of a nontraditional classroom. The various ages and grades teach the kids to deal with several types and ages of students. Also the fact that the Student can move along at their own pace and get that true one-on-one teacher contact they need and deserve.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

98. Because I felt the learning style would best fit my child. I also love the family involvement!
99. We liked that the children get to work at their own pace.
100. The education style and ability for more individuality fit my family's belief. My daughter was just 4 at the time and I loved the concepts, environment, families I knew there and education model and saw that a fit for my daughter.
101. I wanted an environment that would be hands on, moving, whole student geared learning as my children were very 'busy' and I was afraid their natural antsy-ness would be looked at as behavioral issues. I wanted a school that would find the best way to teach my child, not a school that needed my child to fit their mold.
102. After visiting the school on a tour and seeing the classrooms and materials first hand I knew my children would attend. It is a quiet learning environment that would not cause over sensory to my children. The children do not have to sit at desks like in other schools and learn at their pace and can work at their level physically.
103. Primarily as an alternative to a traditional classroom setting. I understand that all children learn at different levels regardless of age. My hope was that the Montessori way of teaching would be best suited for each individual child. At the same time teaching the importance of working together with children of all abilities in groups etc.
104. I gained interest as one of my close friends is a teaching assistant at the school. Through her I learned that Montessori focused more on a student's individuality so I applied for my daughter to enter 4K there.
105. I like the independent style of leaning and it encourages child to be excited about learning.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

106. We lived in [another city] at the time and had toured schools in the community and were not happy with what we heard and saw. We then considered home schooling until some close friends told us about the school. So we toured both the [traditional] elementary schools along with the Montessori school. We fell in LOVE with the Montessori school right away and knew it was a perfect fit for our family. We enrolled our first son in 4K and were accepted. I drove for the first year and knew this was the perfect fit for our family and for our other children to attend so we decided to move to [the city] JUST for our children to attend the Montessori school.
107. I like the different, hands-on teaching style.
108. I liked the philosophy of the teaching method and the concepts.
109. Education model, teachers, environment, values for the Montessori philosophy and an alternative to traditional public education
110. Higher value of education.
111. I was an education major in college and LOVED the Montessori philosophy from the moment I heard about it.
112. When we moved to town we could not believe there was a FREE public charter school that was true to Montessori. WE loved the feel of the school from the get go.
113. We really enjoy the philosophy of Montessori
114. We had heard wonderful things about the Montessori school from other parents and the community. We also really loved the Montessori approach to learning.
115. Quality education based in Montessori tradition.
116. To give our kids a more active role in their education. Physically, they are able to move around in their spaces and mentally they are in charge of more of what they learn/when

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

they learn it. Though with more Common Core integration, this seems to be lessening somewhat.

117. It was close to home and it had the best test scores in the city.
118. Smaller, nurturing environment. Doesn't feel like public school
119. A unique hands on learning experience using amazing learning tools
120. Because I went through Montessori schooling from the Children's House through 8th grade level and understood and appreciated the method. The learning style lends itself well to both of my children's unique personalities.
121. We love the philosophy of Maria Montessori, as opposed to the traditional model of schooling.
122. Because of the Montessori pedagogy and the mixed-level classes
123. We were familiar with the Montessori model and wanted our children to be exposed to it.

Appendix C: Responses to “What makes this school uniquely Montessori?”

Feature 1

1. the staff
2. Mixed age classrooms
3. Classroom setup
4. Student responsibility for learning
5. freedom to move around classroom
6. Classroom settings
7. Mixed age classrooms
8. Takes the time to work closely with the children
9. The children work independently

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

10. Age classrooms
11. Kids become self-disciplined
12. child-led learning
13. dedication
14. The interaction between students in multi-age classroom
15. kids work at their own pace
16. No desks
17. 4K/5K Children's House
18. Classroom structure
19. great staff 4
20. Individuality
21. more parent participation
22. Learning material
23. The children have freedom to learn
24. Presentations
25. Warmth of the staff
26. Methodology of teaching
27. Individual teaching attention
28. Classroom style
29. independent learning
30. Family
31. the 2 or 3 years of grades/ages in one class
32. No homework

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

33. Structure
34. Child sized furniture.
35. Teaching Style
36. teaching style
37. methods used
38. Multi-age classrooms
39. mixed age classrooms
40. calm atmosphere
41. mindfulness
42. Individuality
43. Mixed age classes
44. the teachers teach each individual child at their own pace.
45. learning method
46. excellent and well-trained guides 4
47. materials
48. Classroom environment
49. child works at own pace
50. Smaller classes
51. Teaching principles
52. Self-directed learning
53. multi grade levels
54. Teachers with Christian and moral values
55. This question makes no sense to me.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

56. combined classrooms
57. child directed
58. Classrooms look more like living rooms than "classrooms".
59. hand on learning
60. Children can learn at their own pace
61. on Montessori concepts and theory
62. Materials/work used in classroom
63. Self-directed work
64. No rows of desks
65. Individual attention to students
66. hands on
67. Real life skills.
68. Multiple ages/grades in 1 classroom
69. Flexible
70. Unstructured classrooms
71. Learning approach
72. Highly engaged and Montessori trained staff
73. spiral style learning
74. No assigned desks
75. approach
76. All kinds of subjects at once
77. Teaching style
78. Presentations

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

79. Staff
80. Methodology
81. free tuition
82. Individualized learning
83. Individual
84. Materials
85. Students teaching each other
86. Play is work
87. Different grades one classroom
88. Learning environment is relaxing and very comfortable for the children. The classroom is not full of tables and chair. The children are able to learn in a more comfortable way and able to move around through the day instead of sitting all day in a chair.
89. Montessori teaching methods
90. nurturing the individual
91. community
92. Presentations
93. instructors
94. Hands on Learning materials
95. Students get "work" to independently do
96. Classroom work stations
97. Classrooms are fun
98. Physical Classroom structure
99. Work

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

100. teachers as guides
101. Multi-age classrooms
102. Uninterrupted Independent work
103. More emphasis on small and gross motor skills in 4/5k (chores, household tasks, etc)
104. items scaled down to child height
105. learning tools
106. Children's House
107. The pedagogy - especially at the grades K-3
108. Staff

Feature 2

1. Parents involvement
2. Nontraditional seating method
3. Teacher interaction with students is calm
4. multi-age classroom
5. spend as much time as you need to "get" it
6. Teachers receive extra training
7. Hands on learning
8. Loving caring teachers
9. They are taught how to care for their environment/classroom
10. Family/Group learning
11. Kindness not belittling from teachers
12. mixed age classrooms
13. many nature based lessons

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

14. High behavior expectations.
15. independence is key
16. little homework
17. E1 and E2 format
18. Teaching method
19. individualized learning
20. Unique
21. hands on approach
22. Hands on
23. The children develop a love of learning
24. Materials
25. Methodology
26. Multi grade classes
27. Student accountability
28. Classroom has stations instead of desks
29. Focus on children
30. the classes are very quiet and respectful
31. Teachers
32. Child directed learning.
33. Attention to detail
34. student population
35. mixed ages in classrooms
36. Student choice work

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

37. no interruptions (bells)
38. focus on individual learning pace
39. independent study
40. Creativity
41. Teachers who get along
42. classroom materials
43. well prepared environments
44. learning style
45. Overall school attitude
46. child directs own learning
47. Student Self-motivation
48. Teachings materials
49. Mixed age classrooms
50. peer mentoring
51. Activity based learning programs
52. Reading over this survey I now refuse to take part. Though needs to go into this. these are very poorly worded questions
53. child led
54. learning embedded in every day (routine) activities
55. Odd community struggle. Many students on waiting list yet community doesn't seem to support it.
56. choices
57. children are encourage to be self-reliant

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

58. Multi-age classrooms
59. Mixed aged classes
60. Self-paced
61. Children work at their own pace
62. Independence-building activities
63. early readers
64. Meets children where they are at.
65. Multiple learning activities happening at 1 time.
66. Environment
67. Presentations
68. Teachers
69. Some teachers with Master's degrees
70. No desks
71. Teaching life skills more than just book teaching
72. small class sizes
73. Learn time management
74. Classroom set up
75. Classroom materials
76. Philosophy
77. Concept of no desks
78. Group teaching
79. Life skill
80. Self-directed learning

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

81. "Play" that is actually learning work
82. Autonomy
83. Teaching methods
84. Children's work is hands on
85. Independent learning
86. flexible learning methods
87. compassion of students
88. garden
89. learning materials
90. at your own pace (to some extent)
91. Small group teaching
92. classroom materials
93. No homework
94. environment of "teaching" peace - hallways/playground
95. -directed study
96. Teaching to the whole child
97. Learning at your own pace
98. Children learning from one another
99. A healthy mix of ages in each class allows older children to solidify what they know by helping younger students and the younger students get to work with more mature kids
100. self-correcting environment
101. hands on
102. mixed age groupings

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

103. The mixed-level classes

104. Active Learning

Feature 3

1. nurturing creativity
2. Presentation of skills taught, with ability to work until sufficiently mastered
3. Students are allowed to make their own choices
4. hands-on materials
5. can advance quickly in areas of strength
6. The overall positive environment of the school
7. Child led learning
8. Focus is on the children
9. The students get to choose their work
10. Individualized Learning Objectives/Learning Modules
11. Children can use the restroom when they need to without being a spectacle
12. flexibility in the staff and a willingness to meet each child where s/he is at
13. less pressure about letter grades
14. in-classroom jobs
15. Classroom set up
16. great kids
17. Creative projects
18. Learning at own pace
19. There is happiness/tranquility in the classroom

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

20. Instruction
21. Sense of community
22. Student independence is encouraged
23. Mixed age classrooms
24. Gives some teachers a chance to really connect with the student
25. discipline and respect are a focus everyday
26. Classrooms
27. Not holding students back to meet a norm.
28. Respect for the Students
29. emphasis on cooperation rather than competition among students
30. Montessori materials
31. working, repeating tasks until satisfied and complete
32. teaching kids loving kindness
33. Self-paced
34. teachers who are friends with parents
35. classroom behaviors
36. well trained parents (!)
37. teachers
38. Teachers
39. active environment...not sitting at a desk
40. Mr. Bart
41. Classroom structure
42. Use of Montessori materials

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

43. self-monitoring
44. Good student to teacher ratio
45. learning life skills at early age
46. hands on learning vs. lecture
47. Multi-age classrooms.
48. freedom to repeat
49. the children are part of the classroom process vs just a number in the classroom
50. use of manipulatives in classroom
51. Children allowed to self-direct study
52. Independence
53. Mixed grades
54. Calm atmosphere
55. strong focus on culture
56. Teachers and other school personnel are more involved with their students
57. Independent learning
58. Multiple age groups in same class
59. Manipulatives
60. principal that advocates for Montessori learning at the School Board level
61. individual responsibility is taught, including allowing an unsupervised bathroom break if the student requests
62. Open to child advancement
63. mixed class
64. Learn self-discipline

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

65. Self-paced
66. Parent community
67. Teaching caliber
68. trained instructors
69. on the whole person
70. Peaceful environment
71. Teachers that show genuine caring
72. consequences
73. staff is outstanding, kind, knowledgeable, caring and Hard working
74. hands on materials
75. teaching children to solve problems
76. classroom environment
77. sizes and combined classroom ages
78. One on one interaction with teachers for learning
79. Different ages in one class
80. No letter grades
81. Creativity encouraged
82. Healthy snacks
83. children learning at their own pace
84. Environment/Classroom set-up
85. Self-directed activity
86. The teachers here have a very healthy view of responsibility and work hard to teach it to students at each step.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

87. classrooms divided into areas of study
88. flexibility
89. individualized or small group instruction as opposed to large group instruction
90. The concept of the older students helping the younger students

Feature 4

1. excelling at building the foundation of each process (reading, writing, math)
2. Home like environment
3. Well trained teachers in Montessori methodology
4. teamwork between classrooms
5. The learning activities
6. Great communication with parent
7. Holistic Learning
8. Children help other children
9. within the daily rhythm
10. students given courage to explore topics of interest
11. Flexible teaching style
12. Individualized learning
13. Calm and low pressure
14. The regimented learning in traditional schools where kids sit at desks seem unnatural
15. Process
16. Animals in the classroom
17. Wider range of cultural curriculum

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

18. the kids learn to teach and learn from each other, much like a family at home and in the workplace
19. Assumption that child has ability to handle more responsibility.
20. Work
21. materials for hands on learning rather than papers
22. Practical life work
23. helping and assisting others
24. Variety
25. environment that values the whole child, all day
26. teachers
27. All school staff are trained to interact with students using Montessori based techniques
28. Families
29. family oriented
30. The teachers
31. Classroom layout
32. Emphasis on independence
33. daily life skills
34. leadership skills learned through classroom set up
35. Established routines for many tasks.
36. combined grades
37. no traditional desks
38. presentations to individual students or small groups
39. Focus on life skills

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

40. Same teacher for multiple years
41. Respect for students as people
42. strong focus on the arts
43. Very family and child friendly
44. Multiple age groups learning together
45. Method for learning math
46. Multi age classrooms
47. Highly engaged parents/families
48. Children's House
49. The teachers my son has had have been great
50. All of the animals
51. Combined classrooms (multiple grades per room)
52. Communication style
53. build on skills
54. Mixing of ages and grades
55. Respect
56. Learning from doing. Not books
57. The children take ownership of their work, classroom and themselves
58. positive environment
59. embracing and celebrate each person and their uniqueness
60. Classroom instruction
61. classroom layout
62. I like the way the teachers speak to the students

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

63. Hands on learning tools
64. freedom to progress/not progress at same
65. Materials available
66. Positive environment
67. parent involvement
68. Promoting peace
69. multiple ages in one room
70. ease of advancement
71. activities of daily living emphasis in Children's House
72. The kinesthetic approach to mathematical problems - again at the lower levels

Feature 5

1. each student learns at their pace
2. Children are given duties, and more responsibilities means more accountability
3. mix of grades & ages in classroom
4. Grouping ages together based on life stage
5. Children working with others of different ages helps one develop his or her needed skill
6. Community/Family Learning Engagement
7. Kids become responsible earlier
8. many project based lessons
9. interactive learning
10. Exploratory
11. Beliefs
12. Variance of curriculum
13. the children are self-motivated to learn with the teachers as a guide

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

14. Hands on Environment
15. parent governance board
16. Teachers as guides
17. working on interests
18. No desks
19. environment that respects the developmental differences of children
20. teachers care deeply about the success of all students
21. Ms. Corrine
22. Responsibility placed on child
23. Focus on sounds (not names of letters)
24. multisensory
25. Students clean up after themselves.
26. individualized learning
27. older kids assist younger ones
28. emphasis on peacemaking
29. Focus on cultural identity
30. Child-sized tools & furniture
31. practical life focus
32. Family centered and high parental involvement
33. Math concepts
34. After school activities to deepen learning or community
35. E1 and E2 versus grade levels
36. Children being able to show us what they are learning
37. Student interaction
38. Willingness to adapt to the individual
39. use other students to assist students

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

40. Specialized learning
41. besides reading as an expectation every night our children are expected to get their work done during the day which leaves more family time and community volunteering for evening time.
42. passion of the teachers towards learning
43. Letting the student shine in their own individuality
44. Student chooses what to work on and when
45. Teaching style in the classrooms my children have been in
46. devoted teachers
47. Children have freedom to work on what interests them
48. community learning environment

Feature 6

1. Specific hands on learning tools
2. opportunity for older kids to mentor younger kids in class
3. The children learns on his own pace
4. Manners and respect are important
5. encourages compassion for others
6. Great teachers
7. Culture
8. Student understanding is demonstrated in different ways
9. the learning is not forced, kids learn at their own pace and therefore topics actually make sense and can be
10. mastered before moving on to another subject
11. unique training of teachers
12. Montessori Birthday celebrations!
13. asking for more challenging work and receiving it
14. Learning stations

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

15. classroom designed for child, not adults
16. Mr. Todd
17. Teachers
18. Work choice
19. research projects based on student interest
20. No (or little) class lecturing.
21. freedom to move around
22. kids learn in an open environment, sometimes they don't realize they are learning
23. holistic view of world and of child
24. Additional degree requirements for staff
25. ability to work ahead of grade level
26. Teachers have high communication with parents
27. Hands-on activities that engage students in learning
28. meeting Common Core while teaching in the spiral style learning
29. Older kids & younger kids in same class, able to learn from older kids
30. Ability to move around classroom
31. The teachers are very particular in making sure the each child fully understands the subject
(reading for example)
32. before moving them to the next level so that they are ready to advance
33. resourcefulness
34. Teachers on first name basis: ie Mrs Janet
35. Taught to figure it out, not just memorize of school
36. Children help clean and care for the classroom 4/13/2015 2:38 PM

Feature 7

1. Children have some freedom as to which work they do at which time
2. freedom to explore ideas

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

3. Repetition of activity helps the child become more confident
4. Being able to decide their work & stations
5. involved parents
6. Teaching philosophy
7. We do not have a musical concert in E1 or E2 and that is so sad
8. the children learn to work and its nice and normal to them (from day one in 4K), not something to dread
9. community events rather than performances
10. Student responsibility
11. fewer distractions in schools
12. Peaceful
13. children learn daily living skills
14. Accountability
15. Small group work
16. Some focus on brain development and/or research.
17. no standardized , conformance based testing, well very little
18. intentional system of introducing information to children
19. Project-based learning activities, supplemented by homework
20. cursive handwriting is still being taught
21. Learn at own pace, yet within guidelines
22. The classrooms have mixed ages. So wonderful for the children to work together and teach one another. It's
23. Great for the children to learn how to be a leader as well as learning new from their classmates.
24. Focus on interpersonal skills and conflict resolution
25. Philosophy of Children's house
26. garden that children tend to and harvest

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

Feature 8

1. The teachers give guidance for learning, but encourage independence for growth
2. choice work allows students to dive deeper into an area of interest
3. Confidence
4. charter status with school district
5. Movement during work time
6. responsibility
7. Respectful
8. children learn independence
9. promote independence and responsibility
10. Sensitivity of teachers not to send TOO MUCH homework with students, which interrupts family outings/activities
11. Our school embraces the outdoors, local community, and incorporates when possible (walking field trips, etc.)
12. Great reputation
13. with classrooms mixed ages, it wonderful for the children to be able to move up in a subject if they are
14. Ready where they can continue to be challenged and not get bored.
15. combined age group classes
16. Play & learning is called work

Feature 9

1. random method of choosing students for entrance
2. Self-paced work
3. children learn self-discipline
4. prepared and beautiful environment
5. A charter school model that promotes Montessori learning

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

6. Teachers/Principal who don't get paid more but are required to know more and have more training
7. Materials that the children learn are in depth and very detailed. The children are able to understand and comprehend the subjects.

Feature 10

1. emphasis on parental involvement
2. all people including the child is respected
3. Support staff (early learning, special ed) that includes other students in the Montessori method
4. We have Ms. Janet ;-)

Appendix D: Anecdotal notes on a long work day

On a very cold day in December, the children came straight into school instead of playing outside from 8-8:25 a.m. As the children came into the classroom, I told them, “You may go straight to work today.” They know this is the procedure when it’s an “inside recess” day. The children seemed excited to go to work, reacting with cheers and smiles. Because the children can arrive anytime between 8 and 8:25, “inside recess” days mean the children enter the room in a much more scattered/individual fashion. The children were all so engaged in their work that there was no one available for a presentation; I sat down to observe.

W, a 4-year-old boy, chose Rainbow Name work. (This is a tracing work to practice name writing using lots of colored pencils. I had presented this to him because he wrote his W upside down and only included three of the five other letters in his name, none of which was particularly legible. I was excited to see him repeat this work.) He carefully brought the tray to a table near me and unloaded all his supplies. He returned the tray to the shelf and retrieved his name card from the name card box. W placed his name card on the clipboard and said, “Oh!” He got up, pushed in his chair, went to the shelf, and returned with a piece of tracing paper which he shook near his ear listening to the crackling sound as he walked. He again sat down & neatly clipped the tracing paper on top of his name card. W took out a blue pencil and was about to write the W. “I forgot to make a dot!” (During our presentation, I had suggested he go to the helping chair to ask a teacher to put the starting dots on each letter.) He carefully made all the starting dots in the correct places! “I did it!” He looked at me with a big grin. W used every colored pencil in the box. Then he showed me his paper and said, “Notice all my rainbow colors,” with another big grin. He stood up, pushed in his chair, got the tray from the shelf, placed all the materials neatly

on the tray, and returned the tray to the shelf. He came back to the table for his name card which he put away in the name card box and his paper which he put in his folder to take home.

A, a 4-year-old girl, chose to draw a picture using markers at the easel. She put on the apron and snugly aligned the large paper under the clips. She was very focused and not distracted by other students who walked past or picked work from nearby shelves. Using lots of colors, she drew a detailed picture that used most of the space on the 24" x 24" paper. She included a house, flowers in pots, trees, two people, the sun, and a rainbow. O walked past and asked, "Who's that?" A replied, "Me & Papa. The rest of my family is inside. It's sunny and rainy at the same time. Papa's checking if the flower is growing. The flower is in the dirt, I mean soil." She had completed her drawing so she unclipped the paper, sat on the floor, rolled the paper, and secured it with a rubber band. Next she removed the apron, hung it on its hook, and went to the hall to put her work in her backpack.

A buzz of calm productivity ruled the day.

Appendix E: Anecdotal notes on a schedule A day (Figure 7)

- Children arrived at the rug anywhere from 8:30 to 8:45 a.m.
- Several students jostled for position in line while waiting to choose a book, including arguing among three students as to who had arrived at the line first while two others disagreed about how close someone should be (“I’m squished.”).
- Some of the first children to arrive finished their books, closed them, and began to chat with neighbors or give advice to children in line.
- K was not able to find a spot near N and began to whimper. When asked by the teacher to sit down, he threw down his book and insisted, “I can’t!” K was eventually able to sit with his book following a problem solving conversation with the classroom assistant.
- 5 children approached the observer gesturing for hugs and wanting to share stories, “Guess what.” “Did you know...?” Etc. After giving hugs, the observer redirected these children to join the book line. Several redirections were needed by A and R.
- At 8:43 the full-time teacher began tapping the older children on the shoulder, signaling them to put their books away and line up to go to art with the art specialist in another classroom.
- At 8:45 the observer gave clues (i.e., “If your book has an animal that would make a good pet”) for the remaining children to put their books away.
- During the reading of a story, *Benjamin’s Book* by Alan Baker, W began to giggle and had difficulty calming. Later he lay down and did not appear to be interested in the book.
- Following the book, children were excused individually to go to work.
- The teacher was not able to immediately begin presentations because:
 1. H, M & A were standing in front of the goldfish tank loudly disagreeing about how many children could observe the goldfish at one time.

WHAT MAKES A SCHOOL MONTESSORI?

2. K & W needed redirection to choose a work.
 3. N wanted another hug. “Huggie!”
- The observer sensed tension and lack of direction among the children, as well as a sense of being unsettled within herself.

Appendix F: Graphic representation of the school's Montessori identity in draft form
pending further discussion and adoption by entire staff

