

Frequently Asked Questions about Montessori Elementary Programs

This is a quick guide to answers to the following questions:

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How do Montessori elementary programs differ from traditional elementary programs?

Montessori:

- *The “prepared environment”, a classroom planned in advance to support independent, learner-initiated project work.*
- *Flexibly defined grade levels within a developmental range: 0-3, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-15, etc.*
- *The children acquire knowledge by themselves by working on hands-on projects and reflecting. The children actively discover information.*

Traditional

- *A space suited for lectures and other teacher-centered activities*
- *Grade levels strictly defined according to 12-month increments in chronological age*
- *The teacher provides information and requires children memorize and be tested on such information. Learning is passive.*

To read more, click on: <http://www.montessori-schools.com/Articles/Differences%20between%20Montessori%20and%20traditional%20elementary%20programs.pdf>

Check out five differences that enable Montessori students to thrive:

1. *Teachers are guides, not lecturers. They individualize instruction to keep each child optimally challenged.*
2. *Children have choices, there’s no one-size-fits all curriculum. Students are encouraged to be curious; they are engaged and love learning.*
3. *The classroom is full of materials instead of textbooks and worksheets. Children learn to solve problems and think, instead of repeat memorized jargon.*
4. *The day has two 2 – 3 hour work periods, instead of a schedule where activities are constantly changed.*
5. *Children learn with and from each other, in a mixed-age environment. Instead of competing with each other, they grow into a community, and practice all-important social skills every day.*

To find out more, click on: <http://leportschools.com/blog/five-differences-that-enable-montessori-elementary-students-to-thrive/>

What are some of the advantages of a Montessori elementary education as opposed to a traditional education?

Sept. 29, 2006 -- A study comparing outcomes of children at a public inner-city Montessori school with

children who attended traditional schools indicates that Montessori education leads to children with better social and academic skills.

The study appeared in the Sept. 29, 2006 issue of the journal *Science*.

Montessori education is characterized by multi-age classrooms, a special set of educational materials, student-chosen work in long time blocks, a collaborative environment with student mentors, absence of grades and tests, and individual and small group instruction in academic and social skills. More than 5,000 schools in the United States, including 300 public schools, use the Montessori Method.

To find out more, click on: <https://news.virginia.edu/content/montessori-education-provides-better-outcomes-traditional-methods-study-indicates>

What are some of the positive outcomes of a Montessori elementary education for my child?

Independence, self control, solid foundation, inner peace, care for the world, tolerance, respect for nature, concentration, co-ordination, confidence, self-esteem, ability to rationalize, sense of community, compassion . . . To see these qualities illustrated, click on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3Hfh-wA6OY>

How will my child transition from Montessori education to traditional education?

One of the biggest concerns we hear from parents is: How will my child do if she ends up having to move to a public school? Since a complete PreK-12 Montessori program is not available in every neighborhood, transitioning is something the majority of Montessori kids will have to accomplish at some point in their school careers.

While all children respond to transitions differently, the simple answer is that your child will do just fine. From the earliest ages, Montessori schools focus on helping children develop a high degree of self-motivation, coping skills for dealing with new situations, and a strong sense of respect and responsibility, all skills that will serve them well in a public school setting.

Most parents' concerns are focused on two primary areas: academics and socialization. A few parents who have made the transition have said their child was bored at first, and ready to move onto the next concept before the rest of the class. They wonder why everyone in the class needs to do the same thing at the same time. But most have said their children adapted well to their new setting fairly quickly, making new friends, and succeeding within the definition of success understood in their new school.

Research seems to back up this anecdotal evidence. To read more, including a research study, click on: <http://www.wbms.org/blog/transition-from-montessori-to-traditional-public-school>

How do children learn in a Montessori environment?

Research shows that children learn best when they are free to move, make choices, follow their interests and learn in a way that best fits their own unique learning styles. Children learn best when their environments are orderly and filled with interesting, engaging beautiful materials. Especially in the elementary years, when children are in a sensitive period for learning social justice, children need opportunities to learn from one another and problem solve together. Children learn best when they are in a supportive community. Children learn best when the motivation for learning comes from within, from intrinsic motivation, rather than from outside of the person, from extrinsic rewards in the form of sticker charts, gold stars, good grades, etc.

*You can read research on the above topics – freedom of movement, order in the environment, choice, peer group learning and intrinsic motivation from Angeline Stoll Lillard's book, *Montessori, the Science behind**

the Genius. (Oxford University Press, 2007) You are also welcome to observe the students working in the elementary classroom, and see these factors in action for yourself. Montessori elementary classrooms are safe, happy places where children love to learn. You might also think of these qualities in terms of your own work and learning. Even as adults we are more motivated and successful when we have freedom to make decisions, work in an order and way that suits our personalities, and have some choice in what tasks we will work on. We also do better when the motivation comes from within us!

How does the Montessori elementary curriculum compare to the common core curriculum?

The Association Montessori International (AMI) mapped representative AMI curricular to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Their findings were published in July 2014 on the AMI/USA website. You can find the reports on [math and geometry](#) and [language](#) by following the links. Each detailed report, first lists broad Montessori curricular areas, such as the History of Spoken Language, with presentations, activities and materials used. Next, within all of the CCSS broad domains, such as Conventions of Standard English, each CCSS is listed and linked to the relevant Montessori presentation. The final column lists whether the standard is completely covered, partially covered or does not map at all with Montessori curricular. You will find that the majority of CCSS are completely covered by the Montessori curricular. In many cases, the Montessori curricular goes beyond CCSS.

Trends come and go in education. Now the focus is on CCSS. There are both strong supporters and challengers of CCSS. This has historically been the case in education. (Remember battle lines being drawn between those who supported phonics instruction and those who preferred whole language?) It is worth mentioning that the Montessori curriculum has withstood the test of time, and will continue to follow.

How is testing used in a Montessori elementary classroom?

Students in a Montessori elementary classroom are expected to show mastery of the material which has been presented. This is a cue for both teacher and student that it is time to move on to new material. For example, a student has been independently working on learning the names of states of the USA. He or she has been learning and practicing the names of the states by region. The student will demonstrate mastery in various ways, such as verbally naming the states as he points to each puzzle piece in a puzzle map of the USA. Another student may want to show mastery of skip counting by twos by showing the teacher how he or she can count by two . . . 2 4 6 8 10, etc.

These are just two examples of many opportunities that our students have to show what they know. This is our major way of testing. The time and means of testing are often in the hands of our students.

However, we also realize that state and nationally normed tests are a part of our current educational landscape. By third grade, we will expose our students to such tests, in preparation for future tests they might take. In preparation, we will teach test taking skills, such as evaluating choices in multiple-choice test formats. Developing problem solving skills is a major part of our elementary curriculum that indirectly prepares students for tests, but more importantly, directly prepares our students for life.

What about homework?

At our school, like many Montessori elementary programs, homework is rarely or never assigned. Our philosophy is that our children do their best work all day, from 8:30 to 3:30, and that after school is time that is precious family time. Children need time to relax, daydream, imagine, read, hang out with siblings and friends, play in the back yard . . . They need time to participate in their favorite enrichment activities, such as sports, gymnastics, dance, theatre, music . . .

We do encourage our students to take home books to read to and with family members. Reading together is a wonderful activity that not only helps develop the child's literacy skills, but also a love of literature.

Sometimes children do request being able to take home work to complete, or independently do research at home about a topic that interests them. That is so different from being assigned homework.

How is technology used in a Montessori elementary classroom?

Maria Montessori believed that children should be taught to use the tools of their culture, and computers, smart phones, digital cameras, video recorders, etc., are all pervasive in our culture. At our school, we are aware that many of these devices encourage children to sit still, and can give the sense that by merely watching a screen, you can acquire information without work and without discipline. We are also aware of the concerns of the impact of extensive screen time on children's active minds and bodies. We know that manipulating an image on a computer screen is not the same as a direct experience. Looking at a picture of a tree, or doing a tree matching activity on a computer is not the same as a tree identification hike, where children get to interact with real trees – feeling the bark, collecting leaves and seeds, measuring the circumference of the trunk.

On the other hand, technology provides important tools, used for gathering information, making connections, composing stories and reports, making presentations, etc. In the Montessori elementary classroom, tablets and personal computers are limited in number, like other materials and tools in the classroom, so that students can learn to share and make good use of their time. Technology offers children the opportunity to prepare reports to be presented to their class, materials to be added to the classroom for future use, such as charts, time lines, books, picture and definition cards explaining key concepts . . . Technology, like all other parts of the prepared environment, is used in a purposeful and thoughtful manner.

How does Montessori elementary education fan the inner flame to learn and develop?

To find out more, from one parent's perspective, click on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GcgN0IEh5IA>

*Or find out from Larry Page and Sergey Brin, the **Google guys**, as they discuss their experience as Montessori students, by clicking on: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0C_DQxpX-Kw*

How can I find out more about Montessori Elementary Education and whether it is right for my child?

Watch a video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBs73rff0n0>

"Imagine a School: Montessori for Elementary Aged Children" combines scenes from two public and four private Montessori schools to show the effectiveness of this philosophy of education. The DVD challenges parents to "imagine a school" where education is hands-on, multi-age and takes place in a cooperative community of learners. Covers: Hands-on materials, cooperative learning, multiage learning communities, self-paced/self-initiated learning, uninterrupted work time, respect for other cultures and more.

Read a book: *Montessori ~The Science behind the Genius* by Angeline Stoll Lillard
Montessori Today ~ A Comprehensive Approach to Education from Birth to Adulthood by Paula Polk Lillard

Schedule a visit. *You will be given a tour, provided with an overview of Montessori philosophy and practices, a chance to observe the class in action, and an opportunity to ask questions. Call 509 334 4114 or email Montessori@pullman.com*