

MONTESSORI FOR FLINT

Program Expectations for Flint Montessori Classrooms

The Montessori Method was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, a physician and educator, more than 100 years ago as she worked with kids in an impoverished part of Rome. Montessori education is rooted in an understanding of children’s social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development and supports those natural processes.

The Flint Montessori program, a partnership between the community group Montessori for Flint and the Flint Community Schools, is committed to providing a blended Montessori experience within a public school. We look to resources such as the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector for guidance on how to adapt the Montessori Method to a public school setting.¹ This document outlines our commitments to the Montessori Method and philosophy as well as what adaptations are required within a public school setting.

In the Montessori spirit, this document is always in development, always open for change and adaptation to whatever needs we may encounter in the present and future.

Our program prioritizes the following fundamental tenets of Montessori philosophy, to the greatest extent possible, while still abiding by state and federal requirements for each grade level:

- 1) Each classroom has a full set of Montessori materials appropriate to the age groupings and ability levels represented.
- 2) Students work at their own pace and have freedom within limits.
- 3) Students learn from each other in a multi-age or multi-ability classroom. State funding does not allow for combining preschool and kindergarten classes together as would be preferred in traditional Montessori programs. However, we will replicate traditional age groupings to the extent possible, such as by including “early 5” students in kindergarten classrooms and recognizing that students of the same age do not necessarily have the same skills. We also will avoid placing age groupings together that cross different Montessori planes of development whenever possible. As a public school, Flint Community Schools will only allow two grade levels per classroom as it is too difficult for one teacher to cover all the Common Core State Standards and curriculum for more than two grades.
- 4) Students learn with hands-on materials, moving from concrete to abstract concepts, in extended, uninterrupted work periods of at least two hours, and as close as possible to the three-hour traditional Montessori work period. Special classes, such as music or physical education, are scheduled whenever possible in the afternoon to avoid interrupting the morning work period.

¹ The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector was founded by the American Montessori Society to respond to the growing interest of public schools in Montessori education. The Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public School Sector serves as a reference for the practices and standards we strive to incorporate.

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- 5) Teachers are both certified and have/are in the process of getting credentials from an accredited Montessori program for the age group they are teaching. Staff will also receive support on blending public education with the Montessori philosophy.
- 6) Each classroom is also staffed by a full-time paraprofessional (working 30 hours/week) who receives training for their role as a Montessori assistant.
- 7) Teachers prioritize each student's natural curiosity in introducing and encouraging the use of specific works. Students take on developmentally-appropriate responsibility for planning and tracking their work on a weekly basis in partnership with the teacher.
- 8) The classroom is set up according to the Montessori learning environment: no rows of desks and chairs, lots of shelves to store Montessori materials, and mats that children carefully unroll to do their work on the floor. Teachers must have the ability to set up their classroom in the manner they deem best for all students.
- 9) The classroom environment is calm and focused. Each teacher incorporates a peace curriculum into the overall classroom curriculum, such as the use of a "peace rose."
- 10) The teacher rarely instructs from the front of the room, but often works on the floor or at a table one-on-one, or with small groups of students. The teachers strive to be "the guide on the side," rather than "the sage on the stage."
- 11) One of the central tenets of Montessori philosophy is the importance of connection with the natural world and the outdoors. Dr. Montessori believed the outdoor environment is an extension of the classroom, so students will take part in supervised daily outdoor play. Teachers will include it in their daily lesson plan. On winter days and days of inclement weather, the Montessori classrooms follow the guidelines and restrictions for outdoor play set by the administration of Durant-Tuuri-Mott Elementary School and Flint Community Schools.
- 12) Teachers will communicate benchmarking standards and grade-level expectations to parents, as well as update parents on what their child is working on and how their child is progressing. Teachers will emphasize comments and suggestions for improvement with students when communicating with them on progress reports and report cards. Encouragement and feedback are given in a Montessori-style way whenever possible. This often sounds like, "I saw how hard you worked to figure that out," which emphasizes the student's effort and sense of accomplishment, rather than, "good job," which emphasizes the adult as the judge of quality.
- 13) The program will utilize Montessori approaches to cultivating self-discipline within the framework of the Flint Community Schools' Code of Student Conduct. In practice, this means that students are encouraged to take responsibility for creating the kind of classroom and school community they wish to see, to build empathy for other people, develop independence and conflict skills, and do the right thing because it's the right thing to do. All students will take part in PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support) and CKH (Capture Kids Hearts). Natural consequences for desired and undesired behavior are

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preferred. If parents do not want to have their children receive external rewards, the teacher must be notified in writing.

- 14) Families are warmly welcomed at the school door in the morning, and students say their goodbyes prior to entering the classroom. This helps develop a calm routine and instills independence as kids take responsibility for taking off their coats, putting away backpacks, etc.
- 15) Fine and performing arts education will be part of the weekly offerings, in the form of “lunch-and-learns” or other programming.
- 16) The Flint Montessori Program will seek regular consultation with a Montessori curriculum coach to advise on how best to meet state, federal, and district requirements using the Montessori Methods. Seeking the service of such a professional is highly recommended by the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector. The consultants will have experience blending the Common Core Standards/State Standards with the Montessori philosophy and be hired to support teachers in blending the two programs.

As a public school program, we offer the Flint Montessori program tuition-free, making it available to all families. With that, we accept that we must adhere to the requirements of the public school system and meet state and federal expectations for public schools. The primary adaptations we have made to the classical Montessori Method to operate in the public school setting are:

- 1) All students are required to take all district and state assessments. Students take the same standardized tests that other students in public school are required to take, whereas private Montessori programs often do not require standardized testing. This includes MSTEP testing for specific grade levels as well as district-administered assessments used to show growth from the beginning to the end of an academic year. All FCS teachers must produce evidence from three different assessments to prove student growth; Flint Montessori teachers are encouraged to use Montessori-style portfolios as one of these assessments.
- 2.) Classrooms may be smaller in square footage than classical Montessori programs, so students may be closer together as they do their work.
- 3.) Teachers use the progress report forms required by the public school district, rather than forms tailored to Montessori goals. Teachers adapt the forms as much as possible by providing written comments.
- 4.) Some aspects of the school day, such as having bells ring in the building or the structure of lunchtime programming, are not traditionally part of a Montessori school.