



## Montessori and Advocacy

Most of us are so busy “doing” Montessori that it feels impossible to “support” Montessori. Unless our classroom, or our school, is directly and significantly impacted by a regulation, or policy, we figure we can make the best of it, and just get by.

We make compromises, we adjust, we believe there is nothing to be done, but just how does this effect our ability to provide quality Montessori education over time? How does this attitude on our part influence our non-credentialed school administrators, state agency folks, and the parents who are the “consumers” of Montessori?

Research over the past 20 years tells us that it is the fully implemented Montessori “system” of education that results in such positive outcomes for students and their families. “Montessori kids” have better executive functioning, more positive social skills, and greater academic achievement than their non-Montessori peers. But do we see these same results when those “essentials”<sup>1</sup> are not in place?

The seven states which have created a state Montessori Validation Project (five of those in consultation with Montessori-Now) are in significant agreement with one another, and their state community as demonstrated by survey results, that these baseline criteria to provide a Montessori education include:

- A lead teacher with a credential from a MACTE accredited, or AMI, teacher education program teaching at the level of that credential.
- A developmentally appropriate mixed age group of students (Planes of Development).
- A philosophical approach consistent with the evidence-based educational method taught by Dr. Montessori.
- A Montessori curriculum, and material requirements to implement the program for each level.
- An uninterrupted work cycle of 3 hours.
- An ideal group size/ratio consistent with recommendations for accreditation by the national Montessori organizations (AMI, AMS, IMC, MEPI). (may be limited by state regulation).

Our Montessori community, national organizations, and current research agree with these basic “standards” for fully implemented Montessori programs. Yet we are all too familiar with those “Montessori inspired” or monte-sort-of programs that may or may not include even one of these “essentials.”

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<sup>1</sup> Montessori Public Policy Initiative (2015). *Montessori Essentials*. [www.montessoriadvocacy.org](http://www.montessoriadvocacy.org)

We know there are a variety of state regulations that limit use of certain materials, dictate age ranges and group/ratio sizes, and which don't recognize the Montessori credential at a level appropriate to its rigor. State curriculum requirements and student assessments can be problematic for public programs.

Do we just accept that there is nothing we can do? Do we blame state agencies, or legislators, who "just don't understand?" Do we close our doors and do the best we can in our own classrooms? Do we give in knowing that we are giving our students and their families less than they deserve?

There are alternatives. We can choose to act. We can take one small step at a time to support the Montessori education that will benefit our children. We can choose to advocate.

Where do we start? Ask yourself what can I do, right now, in my present situation? Advocacy can be as small an act as offering to share a book or well-written article about Montessori education with your administrator. One new Montessori teacher we know had numerous conversations with her school principal about the need for the uninterrupted work cycle. The result? Her students now have their "mandated" specials in the afternoon, with a full work cycle in the morning.

Advocacy can be preparing a one-page weekly "newsletter" with your parents, including a brief Montessori quote, a short review of the week, and a rationale for a new activity you will be adding to the classroom. Share photos of your students working with a material and explain its value. Yes, this takes a bit of time, but spending 20 minutes putting together a weekly newsletter provides so much education and understanding (and growing support) for your parents.

As a program leader, you can educate your district about the importance of say, the developmentally appropriate mixed age group, or the need for quality Montessori materials. If you are the director of a private Montessori school, explain the values and benefits of your policies (like arriving on time) to your parents, educate them, involve them understanding Montessori education, rather than letting them "dictate" what Montessori should look like at your school.

Several strong, well structured, state Montessori organizations have been started by Montessori educators. Understanding the importance of starting small, these groups have developed a clear mission that is inclusive of all Montessorians in their state. They have prioritized goals and formed volunteer committees to develop action plans with enough "hands" to carry them out. Parents are often invited to participate in the work of the organization. And with "one voice" they are advocating for the full implementation of Montessori education in their state.

As a dear friend of mine reminds me on a regular basis, it's about "baby steps, baby steps." We can make the commitment to find an hour a month, an hour a day- whatever we can manage (and don't we always find some time for things that are important to us and those we care about?) to act in support of this educational system we so strongly believe in. What are you going to do today?

This is the first in a series of three articles about advocacy in support of Montessori education. We will be exploring ways to get involved in greater detail throughout the sequence.

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As a Montessori educator, Christine has taught at the early childhood level at two schools which she founded and directed, and with Montessori charter schools in administrative, special education, and classroom teacher roles. She currently works as a teacher trainer for several teacher preparation programs.

With an M.Ed. in special education, Christine has been committed to serving students with special needs by creating inclusive classroom environments for all learners. With a specialty in sensory processing disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and issues of attention and executive functioning, she presents at national and state conferences, and consults with schools working with students with special needs.

Christine is the founder and principle consultant of Montessori-Now. In work with state agencies, state Montessori organizations, and schools, she continues efforts to support quality Montessori education.

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