

Why Montessori for the Kindergarten year?

Isn't it better for kids to go to school with the children from their neighborhood?

Once upon a time people bought a home and raised their family in the same neighborhood. There was a real sense of community. Today, the average family will move two or three times before their children go off to college. Many public schools expect a turnover of more than 15-20% of their population a year as families move in and out of the area. The relationships that once bound families living in the same neighborhood together into a community have grown weak in many parts of the country. In many Montessori schools, families who live in different neighborhoods but who share similar values have come together to create and enjoy the extended community of their school. Children growing up in Montessori schools over the last fifty years often speak of how closely knit their friendships were with their school mates and their families.

What are the advantages of keeping my child in Montessori for his kindergarten year?

When a child transfers from Montessori to a new kindergarten, she spends the first few months adjusting to a new class, a new teacher, and a whole new system with different expectations. This, along with the fact that many kindergartens have a lower set of expectations for five-year-olds than most Montessori programs, effects the learning that could occur during this crucial year of their lives.

The American Montessori Society tells of one father who wrote, "We considered the school years ahead. We realized a child usually does his best if he has good learning habits, a sound basis in numbers and math, and the ability to read. We realized that he has had an excellent two-year start in his Montessori school. Remaining with

Montessori for kindergarten will allow our child to reap the benefits of his past work under the enthusiastic guidance of teachers who share his joy in learning."

Once children have developed a high degree of self-confidence, independence, and enthusiasm for the learning process, they normally can adapt to all sorts of new situations. While there are wonderful and exciting reasons to carefully consider keeping a child in Montessori through elementary school and beyond, by the time they are ready for first grade they will typically be able to go off to a new school with a vibrant curiosity and excitement about making new friends and learning new things.

From an academic viewpoint, children who attend Montessori will generally be doing very well by the end of kindergarten. The program offers them enriched lessons in math, reading, language, and a wide range of lessons in science, geography and other cultural areas. However, parents should remember that academic progress is not our ultimate goal. Our real hope is that the children will have an incredible sense of self-confidence, enthusiasm for learning, and will feel closely bonded to their teachers and classmates. We want much more than competency in the basic skills; we want them to enjoy school and feel good about themselves as students.

A time of decision:

For many parents who have had their children in our multi-age Montessori pre-school classes, the logical step is to continue with Montessori for the Kindergarten year and potentially Montessori Elementary. Other parents, planning to go to another educational system may wonder where a good transition time might be.

Let us explain some of the advantages of continuing Montessori, at least through your child's kin-

dergarten year.

The Montessori learning experience is cumulative: what a child learns in the kindergarten year depends on what he has learned in his previous Montessori years. The kindergarten year is the culmination of this learning. In many ways the previous years build towards the top end of the preschool experience for the five year old as a Kindergartener.

In the Montessori environment there is great emphasis on having a child use the concrete manipulative to transition into abstract thinking. Kindergarten is the time when the transition should not be broken. If the transition is allowed to take place in the Montessori environment, children will learn to read, do mathematical operations and begin to think about the world in terms of inter-related facts. It is a social time as well, when children are starting to interact with each other in work and play, and to pay attention to the thoughts and feelings of others.

There are crucial differences between a Montessori kindergarten and a traditional one. In most traditional kindergarten classes, the primary emphasis is on developing social skills with some preliminary work in cognitive “readiness”, whereas, in a Montessori classroom the primary emphasis is on developing cognitive skills on the firm foundation of sensory and motor skill training. In a Montessori classroom, a child progresses at his/her own rate; there are no pressures to “catch up” or “slow down” to the level of the class. The child working at his/her own rate develops good work habits such as initiative, the ability to process information, and the ability to persist in completing a task. The emphasis is on making each child feel competent in his or her own abilities and interested in learning for its

own sake.

At Monroe Montessori School the student to teacher ratio is lower than most traditional school classes. This allows the teacher the opportunity to concentrate on presenting the detailed math and language materials to the children. The child gets a very strong foundation in these “basics”. There are also science, geography, social, art, music, PE and large motor activities. In all these areas, the child learns actively through planned and spontaneous activities.

When it comes time for you to decide your child’s educational future, please do not hesitate to discuss your questions with your child’s teacher.

Thea Heineman
Head of Staff