



# Frequently Asked Questions



## Is Montessori right for my child?

Most Montessori educators would agree that Montessori is a good fit for most children but may not be the right match for their parents. Everything depends on what your family believes to be true about your children and important in their education.

Do you believe that children should be treated with dignity and respect and be encouraged to be independent, self-confident and self-disciplined?

Do you believe the best way to discipline is by consistently modeling the correct behavior and by consciously teaching children how to do things correctly and that mistakes are learning opportunities?

Do you believe that education should be enchanting, intriguing and delightful, rather than overly structured and highly competitive? If so, Montessori may be right for you.

The school is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and the Hawaii Association of Independent School (HAIS).

## Why is there so much variation among Montessori Schools?

Many people assume that "Montessori" schools are essentially alike. In reality, Montessori schools can differ dramatically, in size, facilities, programs, and emotional climate. They share a common philosophy and basic approach, but there may be tremendous variation among schools that use the name *Montessori*. Every Montessori school is unique. Even within the same school, each class may look and feel quite different from the others, reflecting the interests and

personalities of the teachers and students; however, certain characteristics will be found in all classes that are honestly following the Montessori approach. The Montessori approach has three great qualities: the model is replicable, it can be adapted successfully into diverse or new situations, and it is sustainable. (Montessori programs don't tend to self-destruct after a few years, as do many other educational reforms.) However, the only pure Montessori educator was Dr. Maria Montessori herself. The rest of us interpret and filter her ideas.

## What about homework, tests and grades?

Many parents have heard that Montessori schools do not believe in homework, grades and tests. This is really a misunderstanding of Montessori's insights.

### Homework

Homework doesn't need to be boring or a burden! Montessori challenges children to think, explore, and pursue tangible projects that give them a sense of satisfaction. Homework is intended to afford students the opportunity to practice and reinforce skills introduced in the classroom. Moreover, there is a certain degree of self-discipline that can be developed within the growing child through the process of completing assignments independently. Homework should never become a battleground between adult and child. One of our goals as parents and teachers should be to help children learn how to get organized, budget time, and follow through until the work is completed. Ideally, home challenges will give parents and children a pleasant opportunity to work together on projects that give both parent and child a sense of accomplishment.

They are intended to enrich and extend the curriculum. Depending on the child's level, assignments normally involve some reading, research, writing, and something tangible to accomplish.

### Homework assignments may be organized into three groups:

- Things to be experienced, such as reading a book, visiting the museum, or going to see a play;
- Things to learn, stated in terms of skills and knowledge, such as "See if you can learn how to solve these problems well enough that you can teach the skill to a younger student; and
- Things to be submitted, such as a play, essay, story, experiment, or model.

When possible, teachers will build in opportunities for children to choose among several alternative assignments. Sometimes teachers will prepare individually negotiated weekly assignments with each student.

### Tests

Montessori children usually don't think of our assessment techniques as tests so much a challenges. Early childhood Montessori teachers observe children at work or ask them to teach a lesson to another child to confirm their knowledge and skill. Most elementary Montessori teachers will give their students informal, individual oral exams or have the children demonstrate what they have learned by either teaching a lesson to another child or by giving a formal presentation. The children also take spelling tests and prepare their own written tests to administer to their friends. Students are normally working toward mastery, rather than being graded using a standard letter grade scheme. In addition to a Student-Led Conference twice a year, MOMI students receive written Progress or Developmental Reports.

### Standardized Tests

Very few Montessori schools test children under the first or second grades; however, most regularly give Elementary students quizzes on the concepts and skills that they have been studying. Many schools ask their older students to take annual standardized tests. MOMI students in the Upper Elementary and Middle School take national standardized tests yearly. While Montessori students tend to score very well, Montessori educators frequently argue that standardized testing is inaccurate, misleading and stressful for children. The ultimate problem with standardized tests in our country is that they have often been misused, misunderstood, and misinterpreted in their schools. Tests are fairly useful when seen as a simple feedback loop, giving both parents and school a general sense of how students are progressing. Although standardized tests may not offer a terribly accurate measure of a child's basic skills and knowledge, in our culture, test-taking skills are just another practical life lesson that children need to master.

### Reporting Student Progress

Because Montessori believes in individually paced academic progress and encourages children to explore their interests rather than simply complete work assigned by their teacher, we don't assign grades or rank students within each class according to their achievement.

**Portfolios:** Our students compile a collection of their year's work in a cumulative portfolio which follows the child from level to level.

**Student-Led Conferences:** Our school schedules conferences in the Fall and Spring where the student,

parents and teacher discuss the student's progress.

**Progress Reports:** The teachers provide students and parents a written Progress Report twice a year.

## Is Montessori right for every child?

The answer is both yes and no. Montessori schools are often successful with children whose behavior would challenge any school, including the highly distractible and impulsive children of whom parents typically have the most concern. The reason is simple; Montessori is designed to be flexible, adapting the program to meet the needs of each child. It also allows children to move about, socialize independently and progress at their own pace. This does not mean that every class and every Montessori teacher can meet the needs of every child. This is especially true if a child is violent, destructive, or excessively disturbing of the peace and order of the classroom. Each decision has to be made on a case by case basis.

## What if a child doesn't feel like working?

While Montessori students are allowed considerable latitude to pursue topics that interest them, this freedom is not absolute. Within every society there are cultural norms; expectations for what a student should know and be able to do by a certain age. Experienced Montessori teachers are conscious of these standards and provide as much structure and support as is necessary to ensure that students develop their potential. If for some reason, it appears that a child simply needs time and support until he or she is developmentally ready to catch up, Montessori teachers provide it non-judgmentally.



## How does Montessori integrate fantasy and creativity?

Montessori classrooms incorporate art, music, dance and creative drama throughout the curriculum. Imagination plays a central role as children explore how the natural world works, visualize other cultures and ancient civilizations, and search for creative solutions to real life problems. In Montessori schools, the arts are integrated into the curriculum. Art and music history appreciation are woven throughout the history and geography curricula. Traditional folk arts are used to extend the curriculum as well. Students participate in singing, dance and creative movement with teachers and resource teachers. Students' dramatic productions make other time and cultures come alive.

