

A BEST-FIT SCHOOL FOR EVERY CHILD



THE MONTESSORI MODEL

Cleveland is committed to being a leader in a nationwide movement toward learning that is more personalized and engages students more deeply, giving students more control of their learning.

“In a child-centered approach, learning should be joyful; education is about seeing the potential in every child and striving to unlock that potential,” says Jacqui Miller, Director of Montessori Programming and Operations for Cleveland Metropolitan School District (CMSD).

The Montessori Method is one of the ways CMSD works toward this new vision of education. It is a developmental, child-centered approach to learning based on the belief that children want to learn and that they learn best when they have choices about what and how they learn.

Two CMSD schools, Tremont Montessori and Stonebrook-White Montessori, are working toward a school-wide implementation of the model. Other district schools share some of the techniques inherent in the Montessori model. For example, Personalized Learning model schools are child-centered and Inquiry-Based schools center on experiential learning.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

If your student/family is interested in the Montessori approach to learning or a child-centered approach to learning, the questions below can help.

- In what ways does the school encourage student independence?
- Are there ways for kids of different ages and grade levels to learn together?
- Does the school use a Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support system (PBIS) to teach students (not just reward) positive behaviors?
- Are there social-emotional and mental health supports available?
- Have teachers participated in any special or unique training?
- How do they work with students to measure progress and set goals?
- How do they personalize student learning?
- What enrichment programs are available to students?

SOME OF THE HALLMARKS OF A MONTESSORI CLASSROOM INCLUDE :

- Multi-age classes with decreased focus on grade-level tasks and a nontraditional grading system, students stay in a class for multiple years
- Students choose what they want to work on, how long they will do an activity, and with whom they will work
- Montessori classrooms feature a prepared learning environment and specially designed learning materials, where everything has a purpose and place, designed to fit children's hands and abilities
- Teachers give small-group or individual lessons (rather than whole-group lessons) and move throughout the classroom, encouraging student independence
- Focuses on the whole student—social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development, based on the psychology of learning

Learning and development don't happen on a set timeline for every child, despite what many people think. “So, staying in the same class environment, with the same teacher and classmates, allows for learning relationships to develop and for learning to build,” notes Miller, citing another benefit of the Montessori approach.

In addition to supporting CMSD's dedicated Montessori schools, Miller assists other District schools with their Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) programs. In a shift from traditional (punishment-based) discipline, the PBIS approach teaches kids about behavior expectations and strategies to build pro-social behavior. Connecting this to the Montessori model, classrooms are learning communities where children help establish behavior expectations and where social interactions are encouraged and navigated throughout the learning day. According to research, PBIS leads to better student behavior and improved grades. And there's some evidence that PBIS may lead to less bullying.

A child-centered approach to education also recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach to education doesn't meet the needs of every child. Some students thrive with routine and structure, while others benefit from flexibility and independence. Either way, notes Miller, “when parents understand what's possible and feel empowered, we can do remarkable things.”