



MPPI
Montessori Public
Policy Initiative



What We Know About What We Do

THE EVIDENCE BEHIND MONTESSORI PRACTICE



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As part of MPPI's 2015 inaugural efforts to establish a unified voice for Montessori policy advocacy, the MPPI Council developed the foundational MPPI Montessori Essentials. This concise list outlines the core elements that define a high-fidelity Montessori program, providing a clear framework for policymakers to understand what Montessori is, and why Montessori advocates call for specific reforms that promote the growth and accessibility of high-quality Montessori education.

The Montessori Essentials were created in collaboration with MPPI's founding organizations, the American Montessori Society and the Association Montessori Internationale – USA, Montessori pedagogical standard bearers.

To further the impact of the Essentials, MPPI has partnered with UVA's Montessori Science Program to release the following series of literature reviews. These reviews compile and evaluate the evidence from wide bodies of educational, developmental, and psychological research to establish what is known about specific elements of Montessori practice. In doing so, they provide evidence in support of the MPPI Montessori Essentials and offer specific policy recommendations that align with current data, reinforcing the case for high-fidelity Montessori education. These user-friendly one-pagers can be used individually or combined into a longer publication titled *What We Know About What We Do: The Evidence Behind Montessori Practice*.

Teacher Preparation

Montessori Practice

Through rigorous, college level coursework, Montessori teachers study the same broad knowledge and competencies included in traditional teacher preparation, but with an emphasis on the Montessori approach: child development, curriculum, classroom management, instruction (both standard and differentiated) and so on. Some Montessori preparation programs are embedded in the bachelor's or master's degree programs of colleges and universities, but most often they operate as freestanding organizations outside of the higher education system. Standard bearers, such as Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the American Montessori Society (AMS) develop and oversee specific requirements for their affiliated teacher education programs. In addition, the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE), which is recognized as both an institutional and programmatic accreditor by the U.S. Department of Education, accredits Montessori teacher education programs in both freestanding organizations and institutions of higher education, ensuring that comprehensive teacher competencies are met. These systems of oversight and accountability exist to ensure a pool of highly qualified teachers for all classrooms.

Currently, 11 states recognize Montessori teaching credentials plus a bachelor's degree as part of a pathway to a state teaching license.ⁱ These pathways are essential to ensuring that every Montessori classroom is staffed with a highly qualified teacher, namely, one with a Montessori credential. In the remaining states, public schools most often hire state licensed teachers without Montessori experience, who must then undertake a multi-year process of obtaining a Montessori credential. Although some states allow the provisional hiring of Montessori trained teachers, no recognition is granted for the rigorous preparation already completed, and therefore significant (and duplicative) coursework is required to secure a renewable license. Both options are not only expensive, onerous, and time consuming, but in the case of the former, traditionally prepared teachers are placed in student-centered, multi-age classrooms that they are significantly unprepared to lead. As a result, contrary to the policy intentions of NCLB and ESSA, students in those classrooms *lack* a highly qualified teacher

during the years the teacher is acquiring their Montessori credential. Additionally, the absence of a pathway to state teacher licensure greatly narrows the pool of teacher candidates and disincentivizes Montessori teachers from considering public-sector employment. It also worsens broader teacher shortages by filling Montessori positions with conventionally prepared teachers who would otherwise be available for the general hiring pool.

“ [Montessori pathways to state licensure] are essential to ensure that every Montessori classroom is staffed with a highly qualified teacher, namely, one with a Montessori credential. ”

ⁱ CT, GA, HI, IN, MD, MN, MT, OH, VA, SC, WI

What the Research Says

Looking to the research, it is clear that teacher quality matters. In fact, teacher quality is consistently identified as *the* most significant school-based variable impacting student outcomes.^{1, 2, 3} Importantly, highly effective teachers are even more impactful for low-income students.³ Teacher effectiveness is so important that an improvement of one standard deviation in teacher quality is predicted to produce between *two and three times* the benefit for student outcomes than would a 10-student reduction in class size.⁴

Unfortunately, what is much less clear is which elements of teacher preparation predict quality teaching.⁵ All states mandate that public school classrooms be staffed by licensed teachers, the requirements for which consist of specific undergraduate coursework, passing state exams, and often other requirements. A growing evidence base, however, undermines the central assumption of this body of legislation—that stringent and inflexible requirements for teacher preparation will raise instructional quality and improve student outcomes.^{4, 9}

In truth, it has not been consistently nor clearly demonstrated that traditional certification results in more effective teachers.⁵ With the exception of math teachers (particularly in secondary school)^{6, 7} research often finds little to no correlation between teacher certification status and student achievement^{8, 9, 10} and little to no evidence that alternative routes to licensure negatively impact student outcomes.^{6, 11} Just one major study was found (conducted within a large, urban district) that bucked this general

trend in the literature and identified teacher certification status as an important indicator of student success.¹ Otherwise, researchers highlight that, when controlling for all known and measurable teacher characteristics, the best teachers outperform the worst by a degree that eclipses impacts related to certification. Variation within groups (e.g., certified, uncertified, alternative route) is *far* more significant than between them.¹⁰ This implies that policies that tightly restrict access to the teaching profession via rigid certification requirements deserve reconsideration, and that in the case of Montessori, pathways to teacher licensure should be developed that recognize the rigor of Montessori teacher preparation.

Recommendation

We know that teacher licensure requirements without pathways for Montessori credentialed teachers do more than prevent qualified teachers from entering the profession. They also mount substantial barriers to the establishment of high-quality Montessori (an evidence-based and equitable instructional model) within our public school system. **We therefore recommend that all states develop streamlined and accessible pathways to a state teaching license for those candidates holding a bachelor's degree and a Montessori credential issued by a MACTE accredited institution or issued by AMI or AMS.**



ENDNOTES

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