



**Association of  
Illinois  
Montessori  
Schools**

**Common Core Standards and  
Montessori Curriculum Correlation  
Spring 2012**

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**Common Core Standards Mission Statement**

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that young people need for success in college and careers.

**Introduction to the Common Core Standards**

The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy and Mathematics are based on the current College and Career Readiness Standards. Finally released in 2010, the current work was led by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA). Drawing from national and international educational research and standards models, the NGA states that the Common Core State Standards represent a synthesis of the best elements of standards-based work that builds upon the strengths of current State Standards.

The standards cover grades Kindergarten through 12. Each has been deemed “developmentally appropriate” (although some might argue this point) and they collectively work as a cumulative progression of skills and understandings; a “staircase” of growing complexity across grade levels, hence preparing each child for the workforce and/or college. These standards are intended to recognize common goals and expectations for children participating in schools in America.

As specified by the CCSSO and NGA, the Standards are (1) research and evidence based, (2) aligned with college and work expectations, (3) rigorous, and (4) internationally benchmarked. The creators of the Common Core State Standards assert that each particular standard was included in the document only when the best available evidence indicated that “its mastery was essential for college and career readiness in a twenty-first-century, globally competitive society.” The Standards are intended to be a living work: as new and better evidence emerges, the Standards will be revised accordingly.

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The Common Core Standards have some clear design limitations, however, that should be considered upon implementation. They clearly do not encompass all that should or can be taught, the interventions possibly needed for some students with special needs or everything one would need to be *truly* college and career ready. Another critique of the Common Core Standards is that they do not “train” teachers or determine approved curricular models. This limitation works to the advantage of alternative educational approaches, such as Montessori.

### **Common Core Implementation and Assessment**

The major work of implementation takes place after the standards have been adopted, as states individually tackle complementary changes in curriculum, assessment, professional development, and other related areas. States that adopt the standards must adopt all of the standards in English, language arts, and math. They have the option, however, of adding up to 15% of their own state-determined content standards on top of the core in either subject.

To be effective, the Standards need to be accompanied by robust assessments and partnered with content-rich curriculum. Like the adoption of the standards themselves, it will be up to the states to create tools of assessment: some states plan to come together voluntarily to develop a common assessment system, based on the common core state standards (see PARCC below). A state-led consortium on assessment would be grounded in the following principles: allow for comparison across students, schools, districts, states and nations; create economies of scale; provide information and support more effective teaching and learning; and prepare students for college and careers. At this time, each State that has already adopted the Standards has published their own timelines as to when assessment tools will be released.

Currently, twenty-five states have joined together to create the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The goal of this group is to create an assessment system and supporting tools that will help states dramatically increase the number of students who graduate high school ready for college and careers and provide students, parents, teachers and policymakers with the tools they need to help students - from kindergarten through high school - stay on track to graduate prepared.

For more thorough and specific information on the Standards, please visit [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) and [www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org).

### **Introduction to the Montessori Approach**

The Montessori Approach (pronounced MON-tuh-SORE-ee) of education, was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, one of the first women to become a medical doctor in Italy. The approach dates back to 1907, when Dr. Montessori opened the *Casa dei Bambini*, or Children’s House, in a low-income district of Rome. Her unique philosophy sparked the interest of educators worldwide. In the following decades, Montessori schools have opened throughout Europe, in North and South America, and finally on Africa, Australia and Asia, spanning the ages of birth through adolescence. Now, nearly a century later, there are more than 5,000 private, public and charter Montessori schools in the United States, and over 22,000 worldwide.

Maria Montessori based her educational methods on scientific observation of children's learning processes, from birth through adulthood. Guided by her discovery that children teach themselves, Dr. Montessori designed a "prepared environment" (classroom) in which children could freely choose from a number of developmentally appropriate activities.

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It is an approach that values the human spirit and the development of the whole child—physical, social, emotional, cognitive through concrete experiences.

The teacher, child, and environment (classroom) create a learning triangle. The classroom is prepared by the teacher to encourage independence, freedom within limits, a sense of order and appreciation for our cosmic universe and cultural diversity. The child, through individual choice, makes use of what the environment offers to develop himself, interacting with the teacher when support and/or guidance is needed.

Multiage groupings are a hallmark of the Montessori Approach: younger children learn from older children; older children reinforce their learning by teaching concepts they have already mastered. This arrangement also mirrors the real world, where individuals work and socialize with people of all ages and dispositions.

Dr. Montessori observed that children experience sensitive periods, or developmental windows of opportunity, as they grow. As their students develop, Montessori teachers match appropriate lessons and materials to these sensitive periods when learning is most naturally absorbed and internalized. In early childhood, Montessori students learn through sensory-motor activities, working with materials that develop their cognitive powers through direct experience: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and movement.

In the elementary years, the child continues to organize his thinking through work with the Montessori learning materials and an interdisciplinary curriculum as he passes from the concrete to the abstract. He begins the application of his knowledge to real-world experiences. This organization of information—facts and figures—prepares the child for the world of adolescence, when thought and

emotion evolve into understanding more abstract, universal concepts such as equity, freedom, and justice.

### **Montessori: Supporting Child Development & Academic Confidence**

Components necessary for a program to be considered authentically Montessori include multiage groupings that foster peer learning, uninterrupted blocks of work time, and guided choice of work activity. In addition, a full compliment of specially designed Montessori learning materials are meticulously arranged and available for use in an aesthetically pleasing environment. This educational approach also considers the following concepts:

- **Each child is valued as a unique individual.** Montessori education recognizes that children learn in different ways, and accommodates all learning styles. Students are also free to learn at their own pace, each advancing through the curriculum as he is ready, guided by the teacher and an individualized learning plan.
- **Beginning at an early age, Montessori students develop order, coordination, concentration, and independence.** Classroom design, materials, and daily routines support the individual's emerging "self-regulation" (ability to educate one's self, and to think about what one is learning), toddlers through adolescents.
- **Students are part of a close, caring community.** The multi-age classroom—typically spanning 3 years—recreates a family structure. Older students enjoy stature as mentors and role models; younger children feel supported and gain confidence about the challenges ahead. Teachers model respect, loving kindness, and a belief in peaceful conflict resolution.

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- **Montessori students enjoy freedom within limits.** Working within parameters set by their teachers, students are active participants in deciding what their focus of learning will be. Montessori teachers understand that internal satisfaction drives the child's curiosity and interest and results in joyous learning that is sustainable over a lifetime.
- **Students are supported in becoming active seekers of knowledge.** Teachers provide environments where students have the freedom and the tools to pursue answers to their own questions while continually building their knowledge base in a variety of subject areas. Early access and instruction in the use of research tools broaden the possibilities for self-learning.
- **Self-correction and self-assessment are an integral part of the Montessori classroom approach.** As they mature, students learn to look critically at their work, and become adept at recognizing, correcting, and learning from their errors. Additionally, children become comfortable in providing constructive feedback to their peers in effort to work out social and academic problems.
- **Respond to varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline through adaptive communication skills;** demonstrated in Montessori's classroom structure through multi-age groupings, conflict resolution, peer mediation, cultural awareness and sensitivity, and early research.
- Ability to comprehend as well as critique
- **Value evidence;** demonstrated through the support of each child's sensitive periods and innate curiosity of the world,
- **Use technology and digital media strategically and capably;** as demonstrated through early access to research tools and encouraged problem-solving strategies
- **Come to understand other perspectives and cultures;** as demonstrated through early conflict resolution, cultural identification and experiences as well as access to wide range of cultural materials and books.

These concepts are the cornerstone of the Montessori Approach and align with the proposed Common Core Standards outcomes for college and career ready children:

- **Demonstrate Independence;** demonstrated through Montessori's activities in self-choice, open exploration and self-correcting concrete materials.
- **Build strong content knowledge across a wide range of subject matter;** demonstrated through the daily choice of activities in practical life, sensori-motor, mathematics, language, science, culture, art, and music as well as through social interactions in a multi-age group setting.

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### **Decision to Correlate**

Nationally, the need to correlate standards has been an ongoing issue. Montessori programs are primarily in private school settings, but the number of publicly funded Montessori programs has been growing. Currently, there are over 5,000 identified Montessori schools in the United States, with more than 500 of those being publicly funded programs. Any public or charter Montessori project must create correlations to State, and now National Standards in order to achieve approval. Most have undertaken this complex process individually, reinventing the proverbial wheel each time. Private schools are being asked more frequently now, in our 'Standards based' world to show how they are meeting, and hopefully exceeding, published district, State and/or National Standards.

The Association of Illinois Montessori Schools has recognized this need from both its private school and public school communities, as well as the National need for a publicly accessible resource demonstrating the correlation of Montessori curriculum with the Common Core State Standards.

### **Challenges with Correlation**

Demonstrating how the Montessori Approach meets and exceeds the Common Core Standards was a challenge on several fronts. This educational approach or curriculum as we have referred to it in this document does not come in a clear-cut, pre-packed format with lists of activities and lessons. Trained Montessori teachers however, create curriculum albums for the age-ranges they are being trained in: 0-3, 3-6, 6-9, 9-12 and Adolescence. Each album covers a certain subject area and is filled with lesson information on every material and skill concept, along with extensions to these materials and concepts, direct and indirect aims of the materials and sequence to which they are to be

shown to the children. This makes lesson referencing difficult in this correlation as lessons have specific names that are sometimes only recognizable by trained teachers and children in Montessori classrooms.

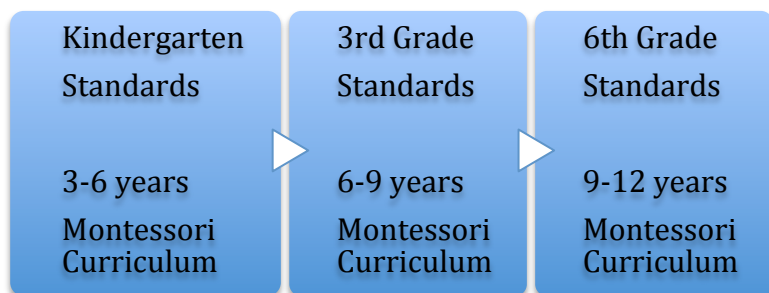
The presentation of the Montessori curriculum within the classroom setting is also different from other educational models. While teachers are acutely aware of each child's place in their educational journey, they do not create lesson plans that are applicable to the entire class. Each child is learning at his or her own pace. Children are more self-directed and allowed to choose works within the age- appropriate classroom structure. This promotes much independence, self-worth and recognition of skill development; all named outcomes of the Common Core Standards.

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### Reading the Correlation

The Common Core Standards divide up language and mathematics learning expectations using a traditional educational model of Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade as its framework. Montessori schools are not divided up into grades, but rather age ranges. To best identify how Montessori curriculum meets and exceeds National Standards, this correlation document follows the Montessori Model of age-ranges and matches these “ranges” to the corresponding grades.

This standards-curriculum correlation is divided into the following “brackets”, 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12. The Kindergarten National Standards are aligned to Montessori’s 3-6 curriculum; the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade National Standards are aligned to Montessori’s 6-9 curriculum and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade National Standards are aligned to Montessori’s 9-12 curriculum. See below illustration for further clarification.



### Possible Document Uses

This document was designed to clarify to the reader how the Montessori Approach of child development and education meet the National Common Core Standards. This document presents applied learning concepts, activities and the Montessori materials that are utilized with public and private Montessori classrooms to ensure the children attending Montessori schools across our Nation are meeting the minimum National and State requirements. This Standards-curriculum correlation will also show the additional experiences Montessori classrooms are providing for students that exceed National and State requirements.

This document is meant to be a foundational representation of what a basic Montessori classroom at each age-level bracket offers its diverse student base. This document may be, and should be, altered from its original version to suit the various needs of public, private and charter Montessori schools, State Boards of Education, policymakers, educational organizations and any other State or National requests.

Below is a non-comprehensive list of some of the possible document uses:

- Charter School Application Material
- Public School and/or State Board of Education Documentation
- School and/or District Assessment Development
- Parent Education
- Montessori Teacher Resource and Professional Development Tool

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### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this document is to demonstrate how Montessori curriculum, when done authentically, clearly not only meets our new national requirements, but also often exceeds them.

*The information from this introduction was obtained from [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org) and from the Center On Education Policy, the Association of Montessori Internationale, the American Montessori Society and the International Montessori Index.*