

12 Tips For Choosing a



Montessori School

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Montessori American School

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12 Tips For Choosing a Montessori School

1: What is a Montessori School?



Before you can understand how to choose the right Montessori school, you should know exactly what makes a school *Montessori*. By definition, a [Montessori school](#) is a school that follows the teachings of an Italian doctor by the name of Maria Montessori.

Dr. Maria Montessori was strongly devoted to the education of Rome's underprivileged children. Her philosophies, visionary methods, and insight into how children

learn spawned an educational movement which has become popular around the world.

Montessori used observations to better understand the inner nature of a child. Some of these observations, which are incorporated into the teaching philosophies of Montessori schools, include the following:

- A child is a dynamic, curious person that has an inner need to know the world.
- A child comes to know the world through the senses. Experiences that develop and refine the sense are fundamental to learning. The curriculum area of sensorial in the Montessori classroom aids children in the development and refinement of the sense, allowing them to explore and learn.
- A child is *auto-educated*, meaning they construct knowledge through physically manipulating the environment. *Handling* of the environment, allows children to construct mental images, laying the foundation for later abstractions.
- A child learns based on personal interest. It is important to give children freedom to select activities that are highly interesting to them. The Montessori classroom contains hundreds of colorful, exciting materials that are of interest to children.
- A child repeats activities until they are fully mastered. A Montessori class provides long, uninterrupted times in the morning and in the afternoon for the child to concentrate on activities.
- A child is orderly and focused. The calm, respectful, orderly atmosphere of a Montessori classroom meets a child's inner need for an atmosphere that supports concentration.



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2: Do They Strive for Academic Excellence?

If you want your child to achieve academic excellence in his or her schooling career, you should ensure that the school you choose for your child shares this goal. So, what exactly is defined as [Academic Excellence](#)?

When we speak in terms of a student striving for Academic Excellence, this is typically referring to the child's effort to fully achieve their intellectual potential. This is demonstrated through the student's pursuit to acquire, adapt, and apply knowledge.

This is evident when we see students:

- Reflecting upon performance, accepting feedback and improving work
- Applying and adapting knowledge and skills to new situations
- Demonstrating solid understanding of concepts and skills
- Possessing a desire for a life-long pursuit of knowledge

In addition, students that seek academic excellence possess skills such as:

- Careful reflection and critical thinking
- Creative thinking and visualization
- Effective communication through spoken and/or written word



Credible schools strive for Academic Excellence from their students. Having been in the community 23 years, and winning the Best of Chula Vista Award in [2011](#), [2010](#), [2009](#), and [2008](#), Montessori American is well known for making Academic Excellence a priority.

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3: Effective Montessori Education

As you are considering Montessori schools, you should demand that an effective Montessori education is provided. So, what constitutes an *effective Montessori education*? Consider the following criteria.

The school's culture should be devoted to helping each child grow toward independence. This is done through building confidence, increasing competence, promoting self-esteem, and teaching respect for others.

Montessori is not simply an approach to education, but is an approach to life. The programs should be based on the scientific research of Dr. Maria Montessori and on Montessori training and certifications.

In the Montessori environment, children are respected as self-directed individuals and their growth toward independence and social responsibility should be fostered. A joyful, orderly, and calm environment should be provided.

Montessori classrooms are designed in a way that creates diversity and optimum learning. The classes are multi-age mix [from toddlers through Kindergarteners](#), allowing for both individual and social development. The classrooms should be beautiful, open styles, with work areas throughout the room and materials available on accessible shelving.

To provide an effective Montessori education, lessons are given to small groups or individual children while other children are working independently. The school should use Montessori materials, stories, charts, time lines, objects of nature, treasures from cultures around the worlds, and some conventional teaching tools.

Montessori students should be guided by the teacher, but should actively participate in planning their time and taking responsibility for their work.

Read what our students' [parents are saying](#).



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4: Private School Benefits With A Montessori Education

Many parents are aware of the benefits of private school, such as smaller classroom sizes, stricter requirements for educators, and more flexibility and room for creativity with curriculum and teaching methods. A Montessori school offers these same benefits, along with the additional benefits of a quality Montessori education.

The Montessori method of schooling focuses on personal development. It discourages traditional competitive measurements of achievement, such as grades and tests, and instead focuses on the individual progress and development of each child.



In Montessori schools, children of different ages share the same classes, and are encouraged to collaborate and help each other. There is an emphasis on "practical life skills", and teachers use special educational materials in order to keep children interested.

Scientific studies have proven that, because of the Montessori teaching methods and environment, students are more mature, creative and socially adept children.

In the US, psychologists found children at Montessori schools out-performed those given a traditional education across a wide range of abilities. Here are some of the findings in Montessori students versus traditionally schooled students:

- 5-year-old Montessori pupils were better prepared for reading and [math](#).
- Not only were five-year-old students better prepared for the "three Rs" at primary level, they also had higher scores in tests of "executive function". This demonstrated the ability to adapt to changing and complex problems, which is an indicator of future school and life success.
- 12-year-old students wrote "significantly more creative" essays, using more sophisticated sentence structures.
- Although the Montessori children were not regularly tested or graded, the researchers found that they did just as well in spelling, punctuation and grammar exams as students who were given conventional lessons.
- Significant positive differences were observed in social skills and behavior.
- Montessori children displayed a greater sense of "justice and fairness" and interacted in an "emotionally positive" way.
- Researchers found that older Montessori pupils were more likely to choose "positive assertive responses" when dealing with unpleasant social situations.

In the United States, there are currently more than 5,000 Montessori schools, and in the UK, where they are privately funded, there are approximately 600.

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5: Kindergarten Preparation



When it comes time to make the decision about whether to enroll your 5 year old in public school, or keep them in the Montessori program for Kindergarten, you should be well informed about the value in having a Kindergarten program available at your Montessori school.

Regardless of a family's financial means, we've seen that families who place a high priority on their children's education will often go to great lengths to keep their children in Montessori through the Kindergarten year. So, why is this?

The Montessori approach to education is considered by experts as the most developmentally appropriate model available. This approach involves working with children in a way that is carefully based on what we've learned about the cognitive, neurological, and emotional development of a child.

Over recent years, educational research has increasingly shown that students in many traditional schools don't understand most of what they are being taught. An important advantage that Montessori offers five year old children has to do with how it helps these children to "learn how to learn".

Howard Gardner, a Harvard psychologist and author of the best selling book *The Unschooled Mind*, states that:

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“Many schools have fallen into a pattern of giving kids exercises and drills that result in their getting answers on tests that look like understanding. Most students, from as young as those in kindergarten to students in some of the finest colleges in America do not understand what they’ve studied, in the most basic sense of the term. They lack the capacity to take knowledge learned in one setting and apply it appropriately in a different setting. Study after study has found that, by and large, even the best students in the best schools can’t do that.”

Sending your child to a local school for Kindergarten as opposed to keeping them in Montessori school can have many significant disadvantages for your child:

Your child will not be provided with the opportunity to complete the 3 year Montessori cycle. Giving your 5 year old the opportunity to stay through Kindergarten is like giving him or her a gift. This is the year when they explode into all of the advanced materials.

If children leave Montessori before they have had the time to internalize their early experiences and Montessori education, then they are not given the opportunity to obtain the full benefit of the program.

Traditional Kindergarten classes often have very different expectations for 5 year olds than a Montessori system. This, coupled with the adjustment period of a new school and setting, severely cuts into the learning that could occur during this crucial year of their lives.

A child who stays in Montessori will reap the benefits of his past work under the enthusiastic guidance of teachers who will share his or her joy in learning.

By the end of the Kindergarten year, Montessori students will often have developed academic skills that may be beyond those of children enrolled in most American kindergarten programs. However, parents should remember that academic progress is not our only goal. The genuine hope of a quality Montessori school is that the children will have an incredible sense of:

- Self-confidence
- Enthusiasm for learning
- Feelings of being closely bonded



Once children have developed these traits, they can normally adapt to all types of new situations with ease. By the time they are in first grade, a child will typically have the ability to go off to their new school with a vibrant curiosity, an excitement about making new friends, and an eagerness to learn new things!

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6: Do They Provide Potty Training for Toddlers?



If your toddler is not yet potty trained, and you are considering a Montessori school, you may be concerned with the school's role in assisting to potty train your child. At Montessori American, we work with toddlers in the process of potty training, to help ease them into this step of their development.

You may be wondering if your child is ready to begin potty training. Many children show interest in

potty training by age 2, but others may not be ready until age 2 1/2 or older. Here are some questions to consider if you're wondering whether you should begin implementing potty training:

- Does your child seem interested in the potty chair or toilet, or in wearing underwear?
- Can your child understand and follow basic directions?
- Can your child ask simple questions?
- Does your child stay dry for periods of two hours or longer during the day? Does he or she wake from naps dry?
- Does your child have fairly predictable bowel movements?
- Does your child tell you through words, facial expressions or posture when he or she needs to go?
- Is your child uncomfortable in wet or dirty diapers?
- Can your child pull down his or her pants and pull them up again?

If you answered yes to these questions, then your child may be ready to begin potty training. When you enroll them into Montessori school, it is important to communicate this with the teachers so that you can work together at school and home to make potty training a smooth and easy learning process for your child.

Your [Montessori American school teachers](#) are happy to work with your child in potty training while they are at school. When your child is at home, here are some things you can do to begin an effective potty training routine.

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Have a talk with your child about using the potty – How to use it, when, and why. There are many books about potty training that you may want to read to your child. It is also a good idea to involve other family members when it is time for potty training, especially older siblings who are already using the potty.

Involve Your Child in the Purchasing Process. Take them with you to purchase underwear, a step stool and potty chair (if you decide to use one).

Make Dressing and Undressing Easy – Put away any difficult clothing (such as pants with lots of buttons, snaps or zips, tight or restrictive clothing and oversized shirts) until potty training is complete. These can be obstacles to your child during potty training. Come up with a praise system, and know how you'll handle accidents. It is helpful, however, to have some things outlined in your mind, like whether or not you're going to use Pull-ups, training pants or regular underwear. Stick with this decision so your child has consistency. Practice a calm, matter-of-fact response to accidents in your mind.

Talk to Your Child's Montessori Teachers – Ask your child's teachers for their advice and make sure you are all on the same page.

Montessori American School will gladly help your child through the potty training process. [Contact us](#) or call (619) 422-1220 for more information.



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7: Know the Truth About Teacher Training



Anyone can legally use the name “Montessori” in their school, so when choosing a Montessori school, it is imperative that you ensure their teachers are AMI or AMS certified. All of the teachers at the Montessori American School have earned this certification, and some have also earned an Associates or Bachelor’s degree.

AMI and AMS are the two major organizations offering Montessori training in the United States. They stand for *Association Montessori Internationale* (AMI, with a U.S. branch office called AMI-USA) and the *American Montessori Society* (AMS).

Most AMI and AMS training centers require a Bachelor’s degree for admission. Training ranges from 200 to 600 pre-service contact hours. It covers the principles of child development and teaches the Montessori philosophy. The training also teaches specific uses of the Montessori classroom materials. Montessori training centers can be found across North America and around the world.

Montessori teachers are trained to teach based on the philosophies of Montessori, which strive to understand the inner nature of the child and encourage learning based on this. Teachers are taught to observe the child and determine what is of interest to that particular child. They also prepare the environment to meet the needs of the observed child.

In addition to educational training, all teachers at Montessori American are also fully trained in CPR and are able to administer this in the case of an emergency. CPR Training and certification is essential when you are considering putting your child in someone else’s care. It is also a recommended for any parent to know CPR as well.

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8: Are the Teachers AMS or AMI Certified?

When choosing a Montessori school, it is essential that the teachers are AMS or AMI Certified. All teachers at Montessori American have this certification.

Beware, that there is a difference between “training” and “certification”. Certification involves taking classes in:

- Montessori philosophy
- Classroom organization and management
- Curriculum
- Manipulatives

During the certification process, teachers are required to write papers, make a manual which is a compilation of the Montessori Lesson plans, and pass tests.

Training can be deceptive. Typically, this should refer to taking the course required to become a certified Montessori teacher. However, in reality, anything the director of a school calls “training” is training. If the school has a good director and is a “true” Montessori school, the training will be a course that leads to certification. However, if a school is not a true Montessori school, the “training” might just be a meeting where the ins and outs of a school are taught, or where the teachers read a little bit about Montessori philosophy.

Montessori American has ONLY “Certified” AMS and AMI teachers, so you can be assured that your child is getting a true, quality, Montessori education.

To find out more about how your child can benefit from the Montessori environment and teaching methods, visit www.MontessoriAmerican.com or call Montessori American School in Chula Vista, CA at (619) 422-1220.



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9: Is Daycare Available?

In family situations when both parents are working in full time occupations, the availability of a day care program is a necessary concern.



Montessori American School does provide quality day care programs for working parents. However, our primary focus is centered around providing an effective academic program and an outstanding Montessori education. This should be the case with any quality Montessori school. The day care is provided as an additional service.

When considering a Montessori school, you should look at the programs offered to ensure that they are focused on providing academic excellence, and are not simply acting as a “daycare” facility.

At Montessori American, our available programs require children to come to school five days a week. We do not offer two or three day programs because young children are incredibly responsive to consistency and order in their environment.

We offer [full or half day program options](#), with time frames as follows:

Full Day 9:00 a.m. – 2:45 p.m.

Half Day 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

For those families who need day care services, we offer an Extended Care Program as an additional service. Utilizing spacious and well-equipped classrooms, as well an outdoor play area, students enjoy this period of relaxation, recreation and creative self-expression.

Extended Care Program

(7:30 – 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 – 6:00 p.m.)



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10: Bilingual and Spanish Programs Enrichment Programs

The mind of a child is like a sponge for knowledge. A child can easily absorb information, soak it in, begin to process it, and retain the knowledge in their long term memory at a much greater capacity than we do as adults. This is why it is so important to begin teaching children a second language at a young age.

Young children are developing language skills rapidly, and they quickly absorb whatever they hear. They can understand new words in different languages at an incredibly fast rate. They can also easily develop the ability to recreate the accents and sounds of various languages. Children are able to pronounce words and sounds that require such things as rolling the tongue or guttural sounds that can be hard to replicate when you are learning a second language as an adult.



At Montessori American School, Spanish is introduced as a second language at an imperative time, when a child is in a sensitive period of language. We adhere to the philosophy of Dr. Montessori, that “No child can learn to perfection as many languages as he hears spoken about him.” Our primary goal in a bilingual program is to help the child develop conversational skills.

When choosing the perfect Montessori school, you should ensure that a bilingual program is in place so that your child can take advantage of this opportune time for picking up a second language. In addition, you should consider other enrichment programs that are available, which will also fulfill a child’s natural hunger for knowledge.

In addition to a [comprehensive Spanish program](#), Montessori American School has a variety of other enrichment programs for children, such as:

Yoga – This helps children learn techniques for self-health, relaxation and inner fulfillment

Art – This program offers activities with oil pastels, color chalk, markers, paints, collages, origami, and drawing techniques. It also offers education in “Art Appreciation” for Kindergarten students.

Music – You can help your child improve learning skills and memory, as well as enhance social skills, through enrolling them in music enrichment. This program includes such things as ear training, rhythmic activities, piano keyboard activities, string instruments (lap harp), rhythm instruments, music alphabets, do-re-mi’s, rhythmic notation and much more.



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11: Student Teacher Ratio in Montessori

An important measure of quality, when searching for a school for your child, is the number of students per classroom. This is typically measured in terms of Student-teacher ratio.

Many educational philosophers agree that a lower teacher-student ratio leads to a higher quality education. This is due to the fact that a teacher with less students will be available to provide more one-on-one, personalized attention to each student throughout the learning process.

Obviously, lower student-teacher ratios do not always equate to a more quality education. Factors, such as the teaching methods, classroom environment, and ability of the teacher to understand each individual child's needs, all play a large role in the quality of education your child will receive. However, even with the best teachers, a lower student ratio is ideal.

At Montessori American, we adhere to a student-teacher ratio of 12 to 1. This means that a teacher will never be responsible for more than 12 children in one classroom. We have two Montessori certified teachers per class, with 24 children.

This individualized attention is combined with Montessori teaching methods and a classroom environment that inspires creativity, a love of learning, self-motivation, and personal development. These factors combined provide an unsurpassed quality of education that is hard to find in a traditional school setting.



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12: Montessori at Home

Practical life exercises are one of the primary foundations of the Montessori environment. These exercises provide a range of activities which allow children to develop:

- Control and coordination of movement
- Awareness of environment
- Orderly thought patterns
- Independent work habits
- Responsibility

Through practicing Montessori skills at home, children gain these and many other characteristics which can be attained through spontaneous, purposeful work. Here are a list of activities that you can have your child easily perform in your home environment:

- ☐ Turning water taps on & off
- ☐ Scrubbing Sinks – For younger children, you can apply the cleanser and they can help scrub
- ☐ Help unload groceries – Let them hand you items, or put things away that are within their reach
- ☐ Dusting
- ☐ Vacuuming – Make it very clear that an adult is to plug it in! Show your child how to turn it on and off and how to clean different parts of the rug
- ☐ Sweeping
- ☐ Pouring – Allow the child to pour drinks from a small pitcher, with only a cup of liquid. Gradually increase the amount of liquid as the child is older and more dexterous
- ☐ Setting the table – hand them one item at a time, and later set one full place and allow the child to replicate it for remaining place settings. Then, finally, allow them to do the whole process on their own
- ☐ Putting toys away – This is a habit. Encourage your child to replace each toy on the shelf after he/she has used it
- ☐ Rolling socks
- ☐ Folding clothes
- ☐ Storing clothes
- ☐ Weeding
- ☐ Raking leaves
- ☐ Watering plants indoors and outdoors
- ☐ Helping wash a car
- ☐ Helping wrap packages
- ☐ Helping decorate the home for Holidays
- ☐ Washing and drying dishes
- ☐ Sorting clothes for a wash



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Toys in a Montessori home

Here are some suggestions for choosing toys in a Montessori home. First and foremost, toys should be safe. They should also challenge the child's interest and imagination without being too difficult or too easy. If your child destroys a toy, it is typically either too simple, too difficult, or is in a deteriorated condition. Toys should inspire a sense of joy, wonder or fulfillment as a child plays with them.

Storing toys:

We recommend that toys are stored on neutral colored toy shelves because they offer the possibility of displaying a toy in such a way that it attracts and lures the child to it. Each toy should be washed often and have all of its parts. If a toy is difficult to store or keep neatly on the shelf, make an attractive box for it. Each toy that has removable parts should have a beautiful small box for the storage of those parts.

Rotate toys:

Toy rotation results in better use of toys. This way, children always feel that some of their toys are "new." Limit the number of toys on the shelves to 8 or 9 at any one time. Remaining toys should be stored accessibly. As the child tires of certain toys they can replace them with a stored toy. Of course, if a child asks for a "stored toy," he/she should be able to have it.

Choosing a quality Montessori school will provide your child the foundation they need, as they embark upon their educational journey. This can be the one of the best decisions you will make for your child!

For more information, [contact us online](#) or call (619) 422-1220. Visit our blog [MontessoriPreschoolKindergartenandDayCare.com](#) for more helpful hints to teach your brilliant child.

