

Montessori School Checklist

Unfortunately, many schools and daycares call themselves “Montessori Schools” without actually following the Montessori philosophy or employing trained teachers. It is a common money making strategy (if unethical) for children-centers to use the word “Montessori” to differentiate themselves in the market and charge more. This poses a problem for parents who are trying to distinguish between daycares/schools that are claiming to be Montessori and those that are truly Montessori schools.

The Maryland State Department of Education recognized this problem and recently introduced legislation, that by 2015, every Montessori school in Maryland must hold, in addition to a Certificate of Approval from the Maryland State Department of Education, a certificate from a Department recognized Montessori validating organization. This validating certificate recognizes that the school has met organization and state standards as a *Montessori Educational Program* in Maryland. If schools do not meet these requirements, they will no longer be allowed to call themselves a Montessori school. Unfortunately, schools/daycares have until 2015 to undergo validation. So until then, parents are left to distinguish real Montessori schools from the counterfeit themselves.

This checklist was intended for those parents who are seeking a Montessori school...take this check sheet with you on your tours! Be the educated parent on the tour - the other parents will appreciate it!

- What is the school’s philosophy? Have they been validated by a state approved Montessori validating organization yet? Have they been accredited any other institution (AMI/AMS)?**

Although it is normal for there to be variations in the implementation of Montessori between schools (some schools do all individual work, some incorporate group work, some assign first works but allow the child to choose thereafter, etc.) it is NOT normal to claim to follow anything but a Montessori program. There is no such thing as a hybrid Montessori program. It is either Montessori or it isn’t.

It is fine for a school to not be accredited by AMI or AMS (think of them as the “republicans” and “democrats” of the Montessori world)...but the school should be able to explain to you what Montessori organizations they do associate with. Also, ask about their status in being validated by a state approved Montessori validating organization. All Montessori schools must do this by 2015.

RED FLAG: The school tells you it follows some sort of alternative Montessori philosophy or it claims to follow some sort of hybrid Montessori program. This is red flag that you are not in a Montessori school. They are already telling you upfront (if in a roundabout way) that they are not a Montessori school. This is often very typical of schools or daycares just trying to pull parents in by using the word “Montessori” in their name or advertising.

The school seems to have no plans or knowledge

regarding school validation requirements with the state of MD or any other Montessori organization.

- Is there a trained Montessori teacher in every classroom (college degree AND Montessori certification).**

RED FLAG: Schools that have some Montessori trained teachers in only some of the primary rooms, etc. “Teachers” that hold Montessori certifications without a college degree (foreign teachers should have had their college degrees translated). Schools that claim to train ‘teachers’ themselves. The answer to this question should be a simple yes - each classroom has a teacher that at a minimum holds a bachelors degree and post-graduate Montessori certification.

- Is the classroom equipped appropriately?**

Montessori classrooms should contain four teaching areas: practical life activities, sensorial, language, and mathematics. This should be “obvious” when viewing the rooms. There should be plenty of open space in the classroom to work on the floor.

RED FLAGS: There are not many shelves in the room, or it seems like they are mostly filled with toys when you look around. You can’t tell when looking where the different areas of the room are. Important, but more expensive, equipment is missing (Bead Chains,

The Bells, etc.). The Montessori program is based on the environment - which is why it costs thousands of dollars to outfit a Montessori classroom appropriately. Each room should have a full set of materials.

Are the ages are mixed?

Toddler Rooms should be under 3 (no infants). Primary Rooms should be two-and-a-half years to six years (independent bathroom use required). Elementary Environment six to nine years and/or nine to 12 years

RED FLAGS: The school is not following these age spans for the classrooms. This flags that the school is perhaps not employing a qualified teacher (required by state at the Kindergarten teaching level) in primary level classrooms - so they move the older children entirely out of the classroom. Either way - these specific age ranges are the core of the Montessori curriculum and classroom for social and academic development and are followed in any real Montessori school. There is a reason Maria Montessori designed the 3 year spans this way (planes of development).

Do the primary classes have around 25 children per class with a three year age span (3-6) to ensure social development.

RED FLAGS: Classrooms that are either significantly smaller than this range or higher. Montessori classrooms should have many children in them - it ensures the social development, maturity of independence, etc. Remember - in Montessori it is environment centered not teacher centered.

Are there three hours of Montessori activities every morning and two hours in the afternoon.

RED FLAGS: Schools that do not do afternoon academics (everyone but Kindergartners take a nap). Children in their second year of Montessori (4 years and up) should be offered the opportunity for afternoon academics even if there is a short mandatory rest period (most states require children under the age of 5 to have at least a 30 minute rest).

Does the tuition seem “on-par” with the other Montessori schools around it?

Although not all schools have to charge the same tuition (and won't), in general most Montessori schools in an area will be “around” the same price because they share many of the same costs for employing qualified staff, outfitting classrooms,

electricity, land, etc. Tuition may vary depending upon the length of the school year, the building the school is in, and perhaps other special programs the school offers.

RED FLAGS: The school's tuition is way below the general norm in the area. This often signals that qualified Montessori teachers are not being employed (the cost of a salaried, college degreed, and properly certified teacher is much more than hourly unqualified staff). Be sure to evaluate the rooms carefully - Montessori classrooms are very expensive to outfit properly...you can not outfit a Montessori classroom with appropriate materials for the same cost as a daycare classroom or traditional school classroom. The saying “If it is too good to be true, then it probably is” often applies here.

Good luck in your search!