



*Okemos Public Montessori
Parent/Guardian Handbook*

Table of Contents

I. Introduction.....	3
II. Okemos Public Montessori (OPM) Overview.....	4
A. Definition of Montessori Education (from the American Montessori Society AMS).....	4
B. Key Aspects of Montessori Education.....	5
C. Okemos Public Montessori and Okemos traditional programming.....	5
D. What a public Montessori school looks like:.....	6
III. Registration & Admission.....	7
IV. Parent/Guardian Involvement.....	8
V. Program.....	8
A. OPM Pre-Primary and Elementary (at Central).....	8
B. OPM Secondary 5th/6th (at Kinawa).....	13
C. OPM Secondary 7th/8th (at Chippewa).....	16
V. Frequently Asked Questions.....	20
APPENDIX A: Montessori Vocabulary.....	23
APPENDIX B: History of Okemos Public Montessori in Okemos Public Schools.....	27

Acknowledgement

The Okemos Public Schools has prepared this staff handbook of program policies and procedures to ensure that the Montessori program in the district is consistent throughout the district.

The following staff members are acknowledged for their efforts in developing this handbook:

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- Matt Prinz, Montessori Chair, Chippewa Middle School
- Jocelyn Mankowski, Montessori Chair, Kinawa 5-6 School
- Kelly Sundeen, Principal, Okemos Public Montessori at Central Elementary
- Erin Gould, OPM Teacher, Okemos Public Montessori at Central Elementary



I. Introduction

Okemos Public Schools Mission Statement

Together...educating with excellence, inspiring each learner for life.

A Tradition of Quality

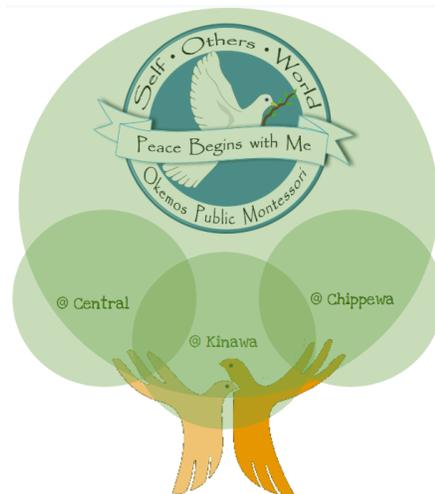
Okemos Public Schools have an extraordinary track record for high quality education. The Okemos Public Montessori classrooms, while differing in method from traditional classrooms, are no different in their goal for excellence in education.

Our Beliefs:

- Children are born with a natural desire to learn.
- Learning is a lifelong process.
- Learning happens when children feel safe enough to take risks with new concepts and ideas.
- Children reach their highest potential when they are trusted, given opportunities to be responsible, and freedom to make appropriate choices.
- Children develop toward their potential at their own pace in an environment that nurtures and respects their unique strengths and interests.
- Children learn by doing, and hands-on activities make concepts relevant to their lives.
- Academic development is integrated with social, emotional, and physical development.
- Children's educational experience is enhanced when their parents understand and support the Montessori philosophy.

Our commitment toward applying the Montessori philosophy ensures our students have the greatest likelihood of becoming confident and self-motivated, lifelong learners.

The Okemos Public Schools seeks to provide every child in the program a strong public Montessori education.



II. Okemos Public Montessori (OPM) Overview

OPM Program Grows

Montes

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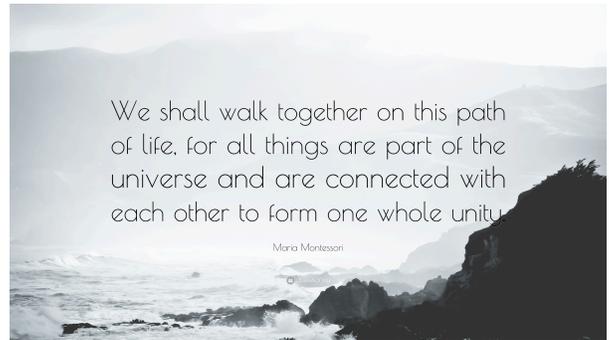
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A. Definition of Montessori Education (from the American Montessori Society AMS)

“For more than a century now, the child-focused approach that Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, developed for educating children has been transforming schools around the globe.

As soon as you enter a classroom, you know that something different is afoot. Montessori classrooms are immediately recognizable. You will see children working independently and in groups, often with specially designed learning materials; deeply engaged in their work; and respectful of themselves and their surroundings.



The Montessori Method fosters rigorous, self-motivated growth for children and adolescents in all areas of their development—cognitive, emotional, social, and physical. Montessori education is student-led and self-paced but guided, assessed, and enriched by knowledgeable and caring teachers, the leadership of their peers, and a nurturing environment.

Within the community of a multi-age classroom—designed to create natural opportunities for independence, citizenship, and accountability—children embrace multi-sensory learning and passionate inquiry. Given the freedom and support to question, probe deeply, and make connections, Montessori students grow up to be confident, enthusiastic, and self-directed learners and citizens, accountable to both themselves and their community. They think critically, work collaboratively, and act boldly and with integrity.” - *American Montessori Society*

B. Key Aspects of Montessori Education

Prepared Environment: The classroom is carefully arranged with child-sized furniture and accessible materials to empower independence. Activities are organized into areas like practical life, sensory, language, math, and cultural studies, allowing children to choose tasks that interest them and match their developmental stage.

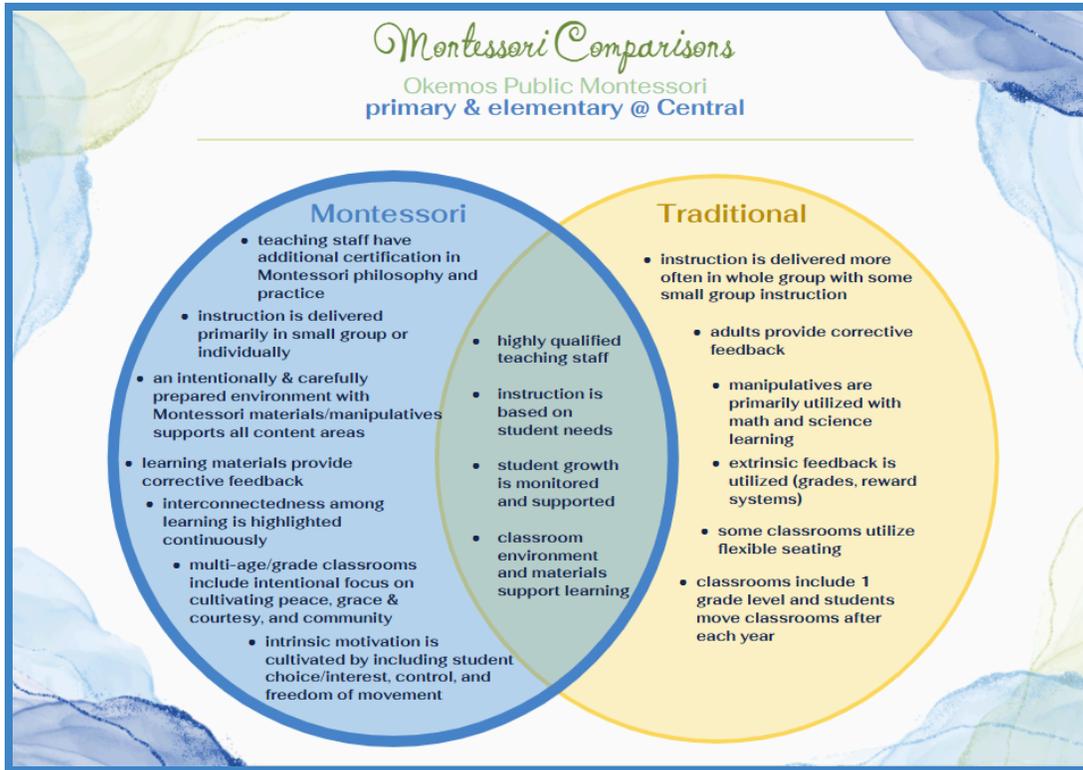
Self-Directed Learning: Children are encouraged to choose their activities, work at their own pace, and follow personal interests. This autonomy supports the development of intrinsic motivation, concentration, and self-discipline.

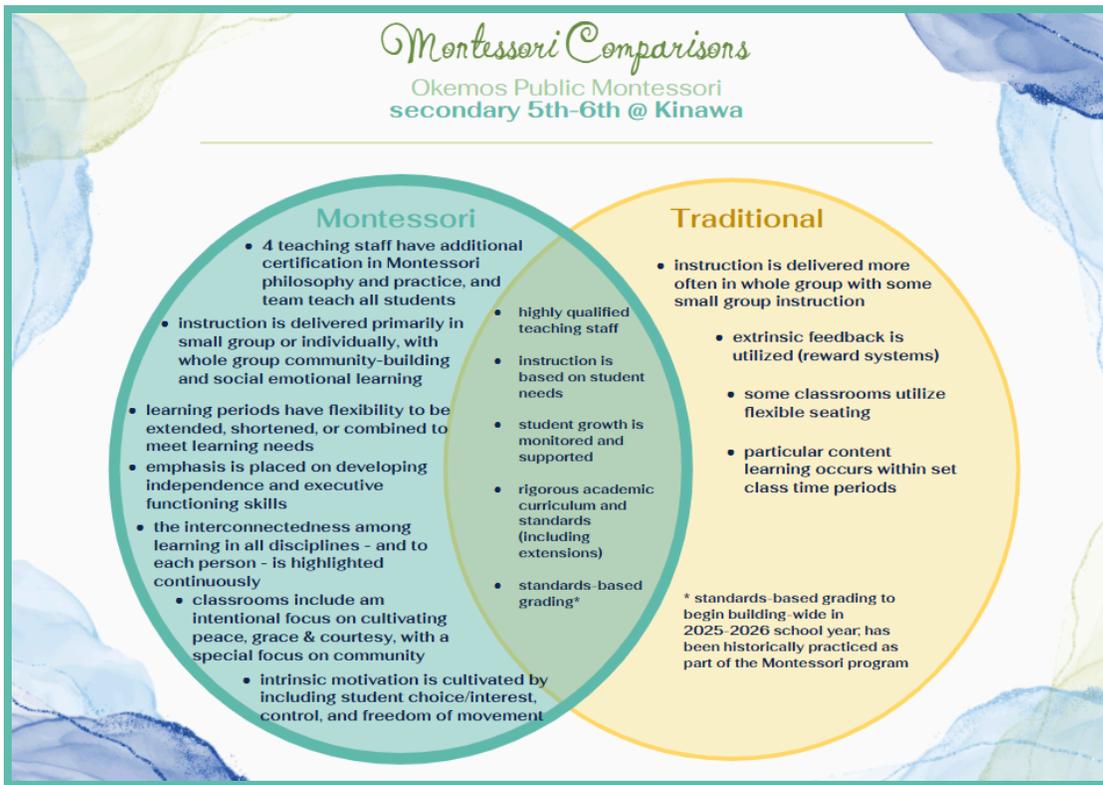
Role of the Teacher: Montessori teachers observe and guide rather than direct learning. They introduce materials and activities that match each child’s readiness, allowing the child to engage deeply and learn at their pace.

Multi-Age Classroom: A mix of ages/grades in a given classroom encourages social development as younger children learn from older peers, while older children reinforce their knowledge by teaching younger ones.

“There is a great sense of **community** within the Montessori classroom, where children of differing ages work together in an atmosphere of **cooperation** rather than competitiveness. There is **respect** for the environment and for the individuals within it, which comes through **experience** of freedom within the community.” - Dr. Maria Montessori

C. Okemos Public Montessori and Okemos traditional programming





D. What a public Montessori school looks like:

1. The Montessori curriculum is aligned and modified to meet Okemos Public School and Michigan state standards.

- a. Learning is differently-paced than private Montessori programs in order to meet the public school expectations
 - b. Curriculum and classroom information are shared with parents each school year (fall). Curriculum is driven by Montessori philosophy and practice at all levels. At the primary level, practical life and sensorial practices are intended to orient children to their immediate surroundings. At the elementary level, children transition from focusing on self to building awareness of others and the broader community/world. Cosmic Education is the backbone/foundational curriculum at this level. The cosmic curriculum provides a context within which all learning fits and connects with each other. Beginning in late elementary and continuing in secondary classrooms, learners begin to cultivate a sense of purpose within, and service to, the world in which they live. For more information regarding the Montessori Cosmic Education, please visit [here](#).
 - c. Montessori classrooms have multi-age learning configurations. Students remain in their learning community/classroom for their entire age/grade range
 - i. pre-primary/kindergarten (ages 3-5)
 - ii. lower elementary (first and second grades)
 - iii. upper elementary (third and fourth grades)
 - iv. early middle school (fifth and sixth grades)
 - v. late middle school (seventh and eighth grades)
2. Similar to traditional programming, students in OPM:
- a. participate in district assessments, including NWEA
 - b. participate in special area elective classes such as art, music, and physical education
 - c. have access to special education, interventions, and gifted and talented programs

III. Registration & Admission

Okemos Public Montessori is an optional program within the Okemos Public Schools. The classrooms have multi-age learning configurations and follow a two year looping curriculum. As such, parents/guardians make a two year commitment by accepting enrollment into the program. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, all students are expected to remain in the program for a minimum of two years.

- A. Okemos Public Montessori at Central Elementary
 - a. Beginning of January: Parents/Guardians will receive a returning survey for their student.
 - b. End of February: PPK-4th grade new student registration is open.
 - c. Mid-March: If student registration exceeds available openings, a random lottery is conducted to select new students for the program. Students not selected are offered a space on a waiting list. If additional openings become available, families are contacted. (Waiting lists are developed for each school year.) PPK-4th acceptance letters are sent.

B. Montessori at Kinawa 5-6

- a. Enrollment is limited to students with prior Montessori or IB experience. Please contact the KMS counselor if interested. School of Choice applications follow the district's traditional student timelines.

C. Montessori at Chippewa Middle School

- a. Enrollment is limited to students with prior Montessori or IB experience. Please contact the CMS counselor if interested. School of Choice applications follow the district's traditional student timelines.

IV. Parent/Guardian Involvement

- A. The Montessori program values the involvement of parents/guardians in the learning process. There are opportunities to be involved across the program, such as field trips, Montessori Education Week, and Fine Arts Night.

V. Program

A. OPM Pre-Primary and Elementary (at Central)

a. Overview

- i. PPK - At the pre-primary/kindergarten (PPK) level, children are within a number of sensitive periods for order, movement, sensation, language, and academic and social learning. Montessori education for preschool and kindergarten (ages 3-6) is rooted in fostering independence, curiosity, and respect for each child's natural development. This approach emphasizes a child-centered environment where learning is guided by children's interests, with teachers acting as facilitators. Montessori classrooms are designed to encourage hands-on, experiential learning with materials that promote sensory exploration, coordination, and problem-solving. Maria Montessori identified "sensitive periods"—times when children are particularly receptive to certain types of learning. Recognizing and nurturing these sensitive periods is central to the Montessori method:
 1. Order (Ages 1-4): Young children are naturally drawn to routines and order, which gives them a sense of security. Montessori classrooms maintain an organized environment where everything has its place.
 2. Language (Birth to Age 6): Children are especially sensitive to language acquisition during early childhood. Montessori environments include rich language experiences, vocabulary development, storytelling, and phonetic awareness activities to capitalize on this period.
 3. Movement (Birth to Age 4): Physical movement is crucial for developing motor skills and independence. Practical life activities, such as pouring, dressing, and cleaning, allow children to refine both fine and gross motor skills.
 4. Social Development (Ages 2.5-6): As social beings, children in this period begin to understand others' emotions and learn collaborative skills. The multi-age setting and emphasis on grace and courtesy help them develop empathy, cooperation, and conflict resolution skills.
 5. Refinement of the Senses (Ages 2.5-6): Children explore the world through their senses, and Montessori materials are designed to refine

these senses, enhancing their ability to classify and understand their environment.

6. Small Objects (Ages 1-4): Children are fascinated by tiny objects, which help them develop focus and fine motor control. Montessori materials cater to this sensitivity with tasks that require attention to detail.

These sensitive periods guide the structure of Montessori education in preschool and kindergarten, creating an environment where children's natural growth is nurtured, and learning aligns with their developmental readiness.

- ii. Elementary (Lower and Upper) - Elementary children are thirsty for knowledge and connection. Montessori classrooms support these needs through the Great Lessons (also called the Cosmic Curriculum or Cosmic Education). Children are first inspired through impressionistic stories and large scale timelines, beginning with the Story of the Universe and then narrowing in focus. The stories inspire content area studies in language, mathematics, science, and social studies. In a Montessori school, the district standards and common core state standards are nested within/connected to the Great Lessons, providing children with broader contexts to support connection and understanding.

Maria Montessori characterized elementary children as being in the second plane of development. They are experiencing sensitive periods in the following areas:

- Reasoning and abstract thinking: Children are in the process of consolidating their knowledge and impressions absorbed during their early years and making connections between and among this knowledge. Children work to classify and organize their understanding and are eager to investigate in order to supplement their knowledge and provide additional contexts and connections.
- Imagination: Children utilize their capacity for imagination to access big ideas that are more abstract. Many lessons involve stories that serve to spark this imaginative stage and fuel curiosity. The Montessori Great Lessons and cosmic curricula utilize imagination through story as a bridge to study, which then leads to a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of all things.
- Social order: As individual awareness is broadened to extend to others in their community, the multi-age Montessori classroom supports the understanding of the strengths and needs of other people. Children find peers to connect and collaborate with in pursuit of their new knowledge and connections. They learn social and community rules that support them as they navigate new relationships.
- Morality and ethics: Children have developed a sense of right and wrong and have entered a sensitive period for justice and fairness.
- Global perspective: Increased social interactions give rise to awareness and curiosity of the similarities and differences in people around the world. At the Elementary level, students engage in learning about various cultures and geographic locations to support their interests and development of the broader world.

- iii. District curricular materials for language (*Into Reading*), science (*Amplify*), and social studies (*Oakland*) are utilized within Montessori lessons and presented in accordance with Montessori philosophy, practice, and in accordance with the Cosmic Curriculum scope and sequence. (Note: Pacing of units at OPM may differ from traditional elementary pacing within the rest of the district.) Montessori math materials, manipulatives, and sequences are used in preference to district curriculum (OPS *Math Expressions* curriculum is not utilized).

Due to our multi-age/multi-grade classroom structure, science and social studies content is provided in a looping manner and taught in conjunction with the Montessori Cosmic Curriculum:

1. odd-even school years: 1st and 3rd grade units of study are completed
2. even-odd school years: 2nd and 4th grade units of study are completed

- vi. School Behavior Expectations are utilized to support the Montessori community.

	P	E	A	C	E
	Positive Attitude	Everyone is Respectful	Act Responsibly	Create a Safe Environment	Encourage Others

b. Learning Objectives:

- i. Academic concepts are contextualized and interconnected, following the Montessori philosophy of cosmic (universal) education. New learning is couched within the big picture so learners can see how each new concept is connected to their previous knowledge and understanding. Stories and manipulatives are regularly used to help students see the connections between old and new information and to support the formation of concrete understanding before moving to abstraction.
- ii. The sensitive periods guide instruction and support. The prepared environment is intentionally built and maintained to act as another ‘teacher’ within the community in service of the sensitive periods of the children.
- iii. Peace curriculum (including mindfulness, social/emotional awareness of self and others, and interconnectedness) is embedded regularly within lessons, independent practice, and daily interactions.
- iv. Montessori classrooms work to promote intrinsic motivation and personal/individualized monitoring of growth and celebrations of success.
- v. Academic and behavioral supports are highly individualized. Students receive any specialized instruction and/or intervention materials based on needs. A student-support team works to help identify strategies and resources to support individuals when there are needs outside of universal classroom accommodations.

c. Assessments:

- i. Teachers observe learners regularly during lessons and follow-up work for formative assessment of student instructional needs.
 - ii. Classroom summative assessments follow units of study and guide follow-up instruction.
 - a. beginning-of-the year assessments for language and math instructional and independent learning
 - b. formative assessments throughout year during individual and small group instruction
 - c. district assessments
 - iii. District assessments include:
 - NWEA benchmark assessments (fall-winter-spring)
 - *Into Reading* Growth Measure (fall-winter-spring)
 - Montessori Math assessments (throughout year), *Math Expressions* cumulative assessment (spring)
 - BASC-BESS screener (upper elementary only, winter-spring)
- d. Homework:
- i. Pre-primary and elementary learners do not receive homework.
 - ii. There are important recommended practices for families/caregiver to engage with regularly at home when possible:
 - Daily Reading (*Recommended time: 30 minutes daily*):
 - a. Read To: Spend time each day reading to your child (even when they are independent readers). Caregivers are modeling fluent reading and expression. Caregivers are also developing shared context for supporting vocabulary development and comprehension.
 - b. Read With: Do shared reading together. Take turns reading sentences or paragraphs or chapters. You are building connections and bonds by reading together.
 - c. Read By: Listen to your child read to you. You are gaining insights into their fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strengths and areas for growth.
 - Writing
 - a. Write messages to each other instead of talking, write together in a shared journal, write about something you just read, write checklists, or write stories together.
 - b. The more your child writes, the more confident they will be in expressing ideas and the more familiar they will be with writing conventions and mechanics. Their fine motor muscles will strengthen and stamina will increase. (Note: Please encourage top-to-bottom and left-to-right letter formation when appropriate.)
 - High-frequency Words
 - a. Regularly practice reading and writing the words that your child practices within the classroom.
 - Math Facts
 - a. Practice until students achieve mastery and are fluent (can answer automatically in about 2-3 seconds). It's also important to practice *writing* fact responses. Students should work to master addition,

then subtraction, then multiplication.

- iii. Occasionally, additional special projects will be offered to extend learning and experiences from within the classroom. Information will be sent home as these opportunities arise.
- e. Grading/Report Cards:
 - i. Academic and social/emotional growth and needs are shared at parent-teacher conferences in October and March
 - ii. Report cards are sent at the end of each semester in January/February and June
 - report card academic learning rubric:
 - a. N - not assessed at this time (concepts not been introduced and/or concepts are not ready for formal assessment yet)
 - b. 1 - child demonstrates little or no mastery; cannot perform with assistance
 - c. 2 - child demonstrates partial mastery; can perform portions with assistance
 - d. 3 - child demonstrates full mastery; can perform independently
 - report card work habits and social/emotional learning rubric:
 - a. 1 - rarely
 - b. 2 - sometimes
 - c. 3 - frequently
- f. School Policies:
 - i. Birthdays
 - Birthdays are celebrated closest to the child's actual calendar date. Children with birthdays on a weekend or over a school break will celebrate on a school day nearest their birthday. Children with summer birthdays will celebrate on the school date nearest their half-birthday.
 - Classroom birthday celebrations are special but simple. Birthday students are welcome (not required) to bring in some special photos from their life to share (for example, 1 photo for each year of their life).
 - Okemos Public Montessori will NOT be celebrating with any food gifts or trinket gifts (this is also true for all other classroom celebrations). Any treats or gifts mistakenly sent in will not be distributed and will be sent back home at the end of the school day.
 - If your child would like to give something in honor of their birthday, we recommend a donated book of your child's choosing to the classroom library (this is neither expected nor required).
 - Only send birthday invitations to be distributed at school if they are given to every child in their classroom. Any select individual invitations must be sent via email or regular mail.
- g. Additional Student/Family Responsibilities:
 - i. Preparation for Weather
 - Children will go outside whenever weather conditions permit per district handbook. Students need to come to school with attire appropriate to both the coldest and the warmest parts of the school day. It is important to wear/bring layers to adjust for temperature changes.

- When possible, donated items of clothing are provided for children who are unprepared for the weather conditions. Sizes and colors of clothing options are limited.
- Wet and muddy footwear are not permitted in classroom work areas. A pair of clean, dry shoes or slippers should be kept in lockers to be worn after coming in from outside.



B. OPM Secondary 5th/6th (at Kinawa)

a. Overview

i. Instruction

- Collaborative teaching, or team teaching, is a focal point at Kinawa placing equal responsibility for instructing the large group on each teacher. This model gives all students two teachers specializing in the subject area being taught. In addition, students have access to two different teaching styles in which to learn from. Furthermore, all planning/teaching is cross-curricular, where guides/teachers make conscious decisions to apply knowledge, principles, and skills, thus providing interconnected instruction across the curriculum.
- Class sizes and the classroom environment are larger due to this configuration.
- Good fit groups/Interventions: All students at Kinawa have access to and will receive a Good Fit placement based on their learning needs. Good fit classes include Academic Extension, TASK, Math Lab, Writing Lab, Reading and Focus.

ii. Classroom Community Learning Environment

- Our work is centered on community in which children come together on two teams with four core guides/teachers. During this stage of development, student's social networks grow and we provide every opportunity to get to know new friends. Our community is built on several core principles including mutual respect, empathy, cooperation, and support.
- We view the classroom community as a foundation for teaching children the value of living respectfully and working together to achieve shared goals. Our aim is to foster a harmonious and effective environment that supports each child's well-being within the group.
- When students join Kinawa 5-6 Montessori, they immediately dive into collaborative activities designed to help them build connections in their new learning environment. Throughout the year, these activities serve as a key tool for encouraging social interaction and effective communication. They offer a relaxed and supportive setting where students can practice active listening, work together, and achieve common goals, all while

fostering a sense of teamwork and mutual respect.

- Students are given more independence at Kinawa while still being reminded of the expectations. Procedures are explicitly taught and are clearly displayed for student reference in multiple places around the classroom and school.

b. Learning Objectives

- i. Each unit is guided by state and/or national standards. We work within all subject areas to establish common assessments and align the standards with Montessori pedagogical standards. Our aim is to develop a program that supports a child's full intellectual, social, physical and psychological growth and development. At Kinawa 5-6 we are one Montessori community.
- ii. Each learning objective (power standard) has been evaluated by the corresponding Kinawa department and agreed upon by its members. Curriculum standards are broken up into smaller learning targets in the form of "I can..." statements. The goal is to make each student aware of their learning target in their own language at the beginning of each lesson. Students are expected to reflect on their progress of learning, understanding, and growth.
- iii. "I can..." statements are presented to all students at the beginning of each lesson/assignment. These statements are found in multiple locations including Google Classroom, weekly newsletter, and they are embedded in the lesson itself for easy accessibility. After completing the assignment or interacting with the lesson, students will reflect on their learning and determine their level of understanding. Most assignments require students to use a "control of error" allowing the student to self-correct. Students are taught how to use the control of error independently in order to receive instant feedback about their progress empowering them to recognize, correct, and learn from an error without adult assistance.

c. Learning Opportunities (formally known as assignments)/Executive Functioning Skills

- i. Lessons are scaffolded to meet the unique learning needs of all students.
- ii. Learning opportunities will be presented to students on the Clevertouch boards for students to reference and copy down in their own planner at the beginning of each hour. Planners are provided to each student and organizational skills are explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced until the student demonstrates proficiency. Once a lesson or activity is completed, self-corrected with the control of error, and reflected upon, students will then turn it in to the teacher or paraprofessional. After showing completed and/or corrected work to the adult in the room, students will have their planner initialed indicating the assignment/lesson has been completed and turned in. The lesson will be recorded and put into Powerschool as completed or incomplete by the end of the week. A teacher or paraprofessional will meet with students to make sure all missing learning opportunities are recorded in the planner at the beginning of the next week. If students cannot meet the learning target with the original assigned learning opportunity, students will

have a meeting with the teacher to make a plan to demonstrate proficiency in that learning target in a different way.

- iii. Planners are meant to stay in the classroom in each student's cubby. Students are assigned a cubby within the classroom, cutting down on the time they leave the room or walk away from their learning task. Cubbies are part of the prepared/shared environment and students are expected to keep their materials, including their computers, neat and organized in their cubby while they aren't using them. Teachers will explicitly teach students how to create a system for organization and provide opportunities to practice these organizational skills throughout the year.
- iv. Students should expect weekly planner checks to double-check for accuracy, organization, and executive functioning.

d. Homework

- i. Homework is not assigned for practice or to learn new concepts.
 - If a student is unable to complete daily assignments in class, that work may be completed at home from time to time. It is our expectation that after school time is spent with family, or after school activities that students are enrolled in.
 - When an assignment is due (typically at the end of the week), there will be no additional class time for students to complete the work. Therefore, these are times when students will need to make a plan to do their work over the weekend.
 - a. Late Work: Since most work is due on Friday (there are exceptions to this in every class depending on the assignment), the weekend is for any work that was not completed on time. To help students avoid becoming overwhelmed with work and to keep work current, students are to fill in their planner each hour, flag/highlight missing or incomplete work, make a plan to get it done, and/or ask for help.
 - b. Absent Work: In the event of an absence, students will have an extra day to complete work for each absence.
 - c. Vacations: It's common for students to request additional work to prepare for upcoming vacation. *Teachers are only responsible for providing two days of academic materials to students in these cases.* However, it is usually easier to work ahead in math so that students can use that additional time in class when they return in order to be supported by the teacher in person.

e. Grading

- i. Montessori at Kinawa 5-6 uses Standard Based Grading (SBG) on a 3 point scale. Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, all of Kinawa will be moving to a 3 point Standards Based Grading scale. This aligns with academic reporting at the elementary level.
 - Focus with SBG is on the skills and applying those skills, not just assignments: Instead of giving a single grade for everything, SBG looks at how well your child has mastered specific power standards or key skills

essential for success in the subject area. These standards are clear learning goals, so teachers know exactly what students need to understand and be able to do. The standards have been identified and agreed upon by each subject department and align with current state and national standards. In addition, teachers communicate these standards daily and they are part of the learning process in our Montessori classroom.

- Benefits Include:
 1. Clear Feedback: Students meet with teachers/parapros and learn where they are doing well and where they need extra help and practice.
 2. Growth Focused: Standards-based grading highlights the progress a student is making over time.
 3. Emphasis on Mastery: Students can retake assessments or get additional support until they reach proficiency in the skills they need to learn.
 4. Standards-based grading is designed to give a clearer picture to your child and to you of their learning journey, focusing on how well they are mastering key concepts and skills over time. Standards are shared, in the form of “I can” statements, with parents and students in our weekly newsletters. In addition, students receive each standard in the beginning of each lesson, can find them on Google Classroom assignments, and embedded in our lessons.

ii. Three-Point Scale:

3 - Proficient: Students have mastered the skill and can apply it correctly on their own, consistently. This is the target level for all students to reach.

2 - Partially Proficient: Students are making progress, but still need support and/or practice to fully master the skill.

1 - Not Proficient: Students are still struggling with the skill and need significant help to understand it.

iii. How It Works: Teachers assess student’s progress toward mastering these key skills using multiple data points. This might include tests, quizzes, projects, independent classwork, conferencing with students, and daily activities.

- Each student’s progress is tracked for each skill, so if they’re doing well in one area but need help in another, their proficiency reflects that. The focus is on growth and learning and not the final score.

f. Assessments:

i. Teachers observe learners regularly during lessons and follow-up work for formative assessment of student instructional needs.

ii. Classroom summative assessments follow units of study and guide follow-up instruction.

- beginning-of-the year assessments for language and math instructional and independent learning
- formative assessments throughout year during individual and small group instruction

- district assessments
- iii. District assessments include:
- NWEA benchmark assessments (fall-winter-spring)
 - Montessori Math assessments (throughout year)
 - BASC-BESS screener (fall-winter-spring)

C. OPM Secondary 7th/8th (at Chippewa)

a. Overview

- i. Chippewa is a “school within a school”. Classrooms are located within the 8th grade wing. Students will have all their core classes delivered by their 4 Montessori teachers. Teachers try to “block” classes to support students’ deep learning and incorporate other Montessori enrichment activities, such as service projects and team building. All electives are accessible to Montessori students (band, choir, PE, etc.) and have a mix of both Montessori and traditional students.

b. Learning Objectives

- i. Each Unit is guided by state and/or national standards. These objectives have been organized and aligned into different themes and connected to other subjects, whenever possible. We have tried our best to connect and blend the subjects and some projects/assignments are cross-curricular. Math is a little bit of an outlier, as students are in different classes and have different expectations when it comes to grades and assignments, meaning that math connections will be a bit more of a challenge and will vary greatly.
- ii. Each major learning objective has been dissected into smaller individual student learning targets in the form of “I can…” statements. The goal of this is to eliminate the guesswork of what is expected to be learned and students will be expected to reflect on their progress of learning and understanding. To do this, students should and will reflect on individual assignments and the corresponding learning objective(s). It should help improve understanding or lead to more questions. Many of the objectives, or “I can…” statements will have more than one assignment to choose from at different levels of difficulty to provide appropriate challenges. Students will be guided to make the best choice of level for them. These objectives and unit syllabus will be provided via Google Classroom.

c. Assessments

- i. Formative (ongoing assessment)
1. Used for feedback and next steps towards advanced understanding.
 2. Check-up Quizzes - Like a doctor visit, it is a guide to show mastery or shortfalls. A prescription (recommendations) are made at the end of each quiz. Students should be able to self-evaluate what errors they made and work to learn the material as not to repeat the same errors.
- ii. Summative (final assessment)

1. Final Assessments - (a.k.a. Celebrations of Knowledge) These are a collection of questions (or snapshot) of the essential learning objectives.
2. Essays/Projects - These are more inclusive and encompassing of the objectives with more freedom to show understanding and make connections.

g. Homework

- i. There are ample opportunities and time for learning in the classroom and it is generally expected to be completed in class. In general, homework is rarely assigned except for math. At times there are larger projects/assignments that just need more time at home to complete.
- ii. There are times when student choices cause there to be insufficient time in class to complete the opportunity to learn, and then work needs to be done at home. The best thing adults can do is ask questions like, “What are you doing? What is your plan? Where will you go next? Why are you doing it this way? Did you consider this instead?” These questions set the tone that adults value the child’s opinion and strategies.

h. Grading

- i. Grades are assessed, at the end of the unit, based on the level of mastery of the objective(s) that is/are being practiced. Grades are not necessarily based on right or wrong answers or points.
- ii. Every assignment should be turned in at 100%; this means it is corrected and fixed for all classes. Assignments will be completed in class, or if needed at home. It is considered “done” when it has been corrected and fixed and then checked in with the teacher for completeness/ questions/ clarification/ feedback etc. The teacher or an answer key/control binder provides timely feedback to check for understanding and accuracy. Quiz results will also provide information where improvement can be made prior to the final assessment or project.
- iii. Student learning is measured through observation and conversation. Students are encouraged to share their learning through questions, such as, “Explain...”, “Describe...”, “What do you understand?” and “What is still not clear?” The determination of the final “grade” includes measurement of assessments, student work, conversations, and professional judgment.

i. Grading Scale for Standards

HP = Shows High Proficiency with understanding - Detail and depth are good, there may be few errors that need attention. For the most part understanding and a solid foundation from which to build upon are there.

PR = Shows Proficient understanding of material - Detailed and complete answers are shown. Additional work or review is recommended, especially with errors.

Evidence shows that the student comprehends the material. There may be structural components from which to add to in the future. Some extra work may be needed.

DV = Shows that understanding of the material is Developing, or assessment/work is not fully completed for full assessment - Many errors, additional work and review is necessary. Holes in the understanding and will/may result in future struggles.

BG = Shows understanding of the material is Beginning. Assessment/work has many errors and shows little understanding. Additional practice/teacher help/peer tutoring/review is necessary. Without extra work future related work will be a significant challenge.

I = Incomplete - Work was not attempted or it is too difficult to assess understanding due to a lack of evidence. Assignments or assessments need to be redone and/or additional practice/ tutoring/ re-teaching/ etc. is needed.

j. Learning Opportunities (formerly known as assignments)

- i. Learning Opportunities are communicated in class and usually on a Google Slide at the beginning of the week and due by the end of the week. Some adjustments may be made depending on a variety of circumstances. Students are supported in prioritizing work, setting a work plan, time management, goal setting and a focus on understanding not just doing the work. Students record their work plan and track progress in a planner that has been provided.
- ii. Most work that is listed in the student planner can be found online.

k. Late work

- i. Most of the student's work is due at the end of the week. Unfinished work may be completed on the weekend. Any late work that is still not completed will receive extra attention by the teacher and an I.C.U. (Intensively Caring about yoU) may be issued for lunch or after school to complete the necessary practice in preparation for the final assessments.

l. Absent work

- i. If a student is absent, an extra day for each day absent will be given with no consequences. The exception to this is longer assignments or things that we have been working on or assigned when the student was present for instructions.
- ii. At times, life happens and impedes the learning and work process. If this occurs, students are encouraged to learn self-advocacy by having a face to face conversation with the teacher to work out an agreement.
- iii. When work is completed, students should sign or check their planner off. It must be turned in and will be recorded on PowerSchool as completed and feedback given as needed.
- iv. Rubrics and directions will be provided when appropriate and posted with the assignment.
- v. When needed, feedback rather than scores will be provided.

m. Student Responsibilities

- i. Planner - Students will be filling out their planner with the work and lessons at the beginning of the week. That information is found on our whiteboards and on digital presentations. As they complete the learning opportunities, they are expected to correct their work, sign or check it off in their planner, and submit it to the teacher.
 - ii. Reflections - Part of Maria Montessori's research showed the value and importance of self-reflection at this plane of development. Students are required to reflect in a variety of ways, including Skills for Lifelong Learning, a self-evaluation of their skills at the end of every trimester. Each learning opportunity should be evaluated for learning and connections to objectives.
- n. Projects & Trips
- i. Service Learning Projects are designed to teach what it means to be a contributing member of society. Maria Montessori realized that this age group needed to be challenged academically and see the interconnectedness of the world around them but also to foster their connection to society as they transition to being a part of it.
 - ii. In the last plane of development identified by Maria Montessori, students engage in care of the environment and nature. Entrepreneurial and stewardship skills are learned through the maintenance and work in a greenhouse.
 - iii. Capstone Trip: To signify the end of the OPM journey, there is an annual trip to Washington DC. All 8th grade Montessori students are invited to attend.

V. Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What does a Montessori classroom look like?

A. Montessori classrooms are intentionally prepared environments. They are simple and natural in appearance, complete with Montessori materials/manipulatives. Extraneous elements (visuals, non-Montessori materials) are identified to serve particular purposes. Montessori communities have a variety of configurations that provide flexibility for different types of learning (e.g. whole-group learning, small-group learning, and individual learning). The community is carefully maintained to reflect order and beauty, and students are involved in maintaining the classroom community.



"The child must live in an environment of beauty" - Dr. Maria Montessori



Q. Will my child follow their own pacing for learning?

A. Partially. We follow the child and modify when appropriate. As a public school we adhere to state standards and guidelines adopted by the OPS School Board for each grade level. However, lessons and instruction are based on Maria Montessori's manipulatives, lessons, practices, models and research.

Q. Can my child take part in electives, such as music and art?

A. OPM at Central: Yes. Students have the same opportunities as other Okemos Elementary schools to attend special area classes, including Physical Education, Music, and Art.

B. OPM at Kinawa: Yes. Students have four academic classes, plus a FIT class, PE/Exploratory Class, and a Music/Elective Class. FIT Classes include Academic Extension or an intervention class of TASK, Connections, Math Lab, Reading Lab, or Writing Lab. Students that choose to participate in a performance music class are enrolled in Band, Orchestra or Choir as a yearlong class. An alternative option would be the Elective Wheel which includes a rotation each trimester of Music Appreciation and two other elective classes. Students also have 6-weeks of various exploratory classes (Art, Technology, Life Skills) and Physical Education (12-weeks) throughout the year. Exploratory Classes, Music Classes and Elective (non-academic) classes will have both Montessori and traditional students together.

C. OPM at Chippewa: Yes. Students have four academic classes, plus the same electives as their peers (one of which will be PE at CMS). Year-long electives include choir, band, orchestra, or a foreign language, and trimester-long electives include foods, art classes, computer classes, technology, design classes, and many others. Other academic support classes include reading remediation, math lab, TASK and Resource provide students additional help. Elective (non-academic) classes include both Montessori and traditional students together.

Q. Will my child have access to special education services or intervention services?

A. Yes. As part of a public school, all students have access to the services needed to be successful at Okemos Public Schools.

Q. Can my child be enrolled in advanced math classes?

A. Yes. All students have access to advanced math programming, if eligible.

Q. Will my child be required to take state assessments?

A. Yes. As part of a public school, all students take part in state required assessments, such as the M-STEP and PSAT.

Q. At the middle school Montessori programs, will my child ever see their other friends?

A. Yes. In both middle school Montessori programs, your child will see their other Montessori friends throughout the day during their core classes. In addition, your child will see their friends from the traditional classes during the hours they are not in academic classes. Students will be in elective classes, Physical Education, Art, and Music with traditional students.

At Kinawa, fifth and sixth grade Montessori students are assigned to “A” lunch with the sixth grade traditional students. This means that students also have lunch recess with both Montessori teams as well as with the sixth grade traditional students.

Q. What does the Secondary Montessori Program at Chippewa look like since Maria Montessori didn’t develop a secondary curriculum?

A. Students have four academic teachers like every student in the building. In the Montessori program, students are provided choices (what, when, where, how) in their learning and assignments using weekly work plans and checklists to guide daily work. Students take part in community meetings, perform service learning projects, participate in team-building activities, and practice microeconomy work in the greenhouse, as well as other projects. There are not as many Montessori manipulatives as in the elementary years, as students are transitioning away from concrete/tactile thinking to abstract thinking. The overall focus is helping students to become an “independent learner.” Students will have many opportunities for goal-setting and reflecting in the development of their academic, social, and emotional skills. In keeping with the Montessori philosophy, classes are multi-age with the same Montessori teachers for both Chippewa years, allowing for a two-year learning loop.

Q. Will my child be prepared for high school?

A. Yes. Historically, OPM students have done exceptionally well transitioning to high school. The vast majority of students share that they were well-prepared for the transition. With a focus on independent learning, time management, and organization, students have the necessary skills to be successful in any future challenge. Okemos high school teachers have shared that Montessori students are successful in modeling how to have discussions, leading the discussions (learned from seminars), note taking, and time management skills.

APPENDIX A: Montessori Vocabulary

Montessori Vocabulary
(As adopted from the American Montessori Society ®)

Absorbent mind – From birth through approximately age 6, the young child experiences a period of intense mental activity that allows her to “absorb” learning from her environment quickly and easily without conscious effort.

Casa dei Bambini – In Italian, “Children’s House,” and the name of Dr. Montessori’s first school.

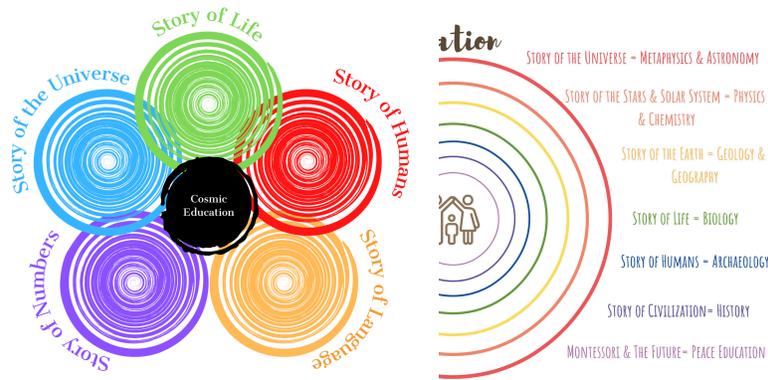
Children’s House – In many Montessori schools, this is the name of the classroom for children ages 2.5 (or 3) to 6 years; other schools call the classroom for this age group Casa, preschool, primary, or early childhood.

Concrete to abstract – A logical, developmentally appropriate progression that allows the child to develop an abstract understanding of a concept by first encountering it in a concrete form, such as learning the mathematical concept of the decimal system by working with Golden Beads grouped into units, 10s, 100s, and 1,000s.

Control of error – Montessori materials are designed so that the child receives instant feedback about her progress as she works, allowing her to recognize, correct, and learn from an error without adult assistance. Putting control of the activity in the child’s hands strengthens her self-esteem and self-motivation as well as her learning.

Coordination of movement – Refining large- and fine-motor movements is one of the accomplishments of early childhood development, as the child learns to complete tasks independently. The Montessori classroom offers opportunities for children to refine their movements and children are drawn to these activities, especially to those which require exactitude and precision.

Cosmic education – Maria Montessori urged us to give children a “vision of the universe” to help them discover how all of its parts are interconnected and interdependent, and to help them understand their place in society and the world. In Montessori schools, children in Elementary programs (between the ages of 6 – 12) learn about the creation of the universe through stories that integrate the studies of astronomy, chemistry, biology, geography, and history. These lessons help children become aware of their own roles and responsibilities as humans and as members of society, and help them explore their “cosmic task”—their unique, meaningful purpose in the world.



Didactic materials – Didactic meaning “designed or intended to teach,” these are the specially-designed instructional materials—many invented by Maria Montessori—that are a hallmark of all Montessori classrooms.

Directress or guide – Historically, the designation for the lead teacher in a Montessori classroom; some schools still refer to the lead teacher as “directress” or “guide,” while others use the more recognizable term, “teacher.” In Montessori education, the role of the teacher is to guide individual children to purposeful activity based upon her observations of each child’s readiness and interests.

Erdkinder – German for “child of the earth,” this term describes a Montessori learning environment for adolescents ages 12 – 15 that connects them with nature and engages them in purposeful, hands-on work in which they contribute to the community. Erdkinder programs are often referred to as “farm schools.”

Freedom within limits – Montessori classrooms are carefully and thoughtfully designed to encourage children to move about freely and choose their own work, within reasonable limits of appropriate behavior. Those limits are the classroom ground rules, and enable children to exercise their own free will while ensuring that their chosen activities are respectful of others and their environment.

Grace and courtesy – In Montessori schools, children are formally instructed in social skills they will use throughout their lives, for example, saying “please” and “thank you,” interrupting conversations politely, requesting rather than demanding assistance, and greeting guests warmly.

Ground rules – Classroom rules in the Montessori classroom are typically referred to as “ground rules” which dictate appropriate behavior in the classroom. At all age-levels, the ground rules are simple—children are free to work with any material or activity displayed in the environment as long as they use it respectfully. They may not harm the material, themselves, or others.

Mixed-age grouping (or multi-age grouping) – One of the hallmarks of Montessori education is that children of mixed ages work together in the same class. Age groupings are based on the Planes of Development as identified by Dr. Maria Montessori. Multi-age groupings enable younger children to learn from older children and experience new challenges through observation; older children reinforce their learning by teaching concepts they have already mastered, develop leadership skills, and serve as role models. Because each child’s work is individual, children progress at their own pace; there is cooperation rather than competition between the ages. This arrangement mirrors the real world, in which individuals work and socialize with people of all ages and dispositions. Typically, children from 2.5/3 – 6 years of age are grouped together in an Early Childhood classroom. 6 – 9 year olds share the Lower Elementary (grades 1 – 3) and the Upper Elementary is made up of 9 – 12 year olds (grades 4 – 6). At

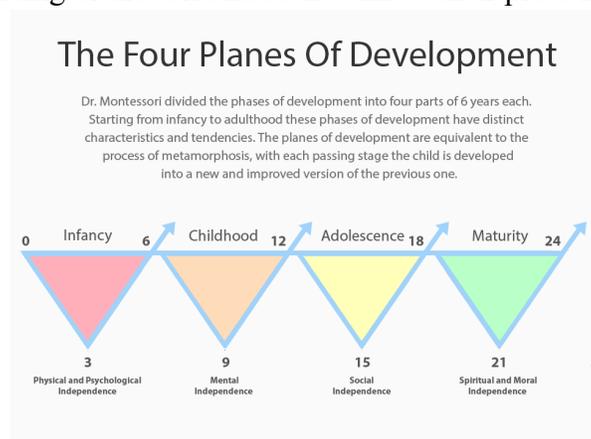
the Secondary level, groupings may be 2- or 3-years. Children from birth – age 3 may be grouped in varying multi-age configurations, and are commonly grouped from birth to 15/18 months (or when mobile) and 15/18 months to age 3.

Montessori – The term may refer to Dr. Maria Montessori, founder of the Montessori Method of education, or the method itself.

Nido – “Nest” in Italian, this is a Montessori environment for infants, though not all schools that offer an infant program use this term.

Normalization – A natural developmental process exhibited by a love of work or activity, concentration, self-discipline, and joy in accomplishment. Dr. Montessori observed that children in Montessori programs exhibit normalization through repeated periods of uninterrupted work during which time they work freely and at their own pace on their own chosen activities. A normalized child is a happy, well-adjusted child who exhibits positive social skills in the Montessori classroom.

Planes of development – Four distinct periods of growth, development, and learning identifies by Dr. Maria Montessori that a human being progresses through: ages 0 – 6 (the period of the “absorbent mind”); 6 – 12 (the period of reasoning and abstraction); 12 – 18 (when adolescents construct the “social self,” developing moral values and becoming emotionally independent); and 18 – 24 years (when young adults construct an understanding of the self and seek to know their place in the world).



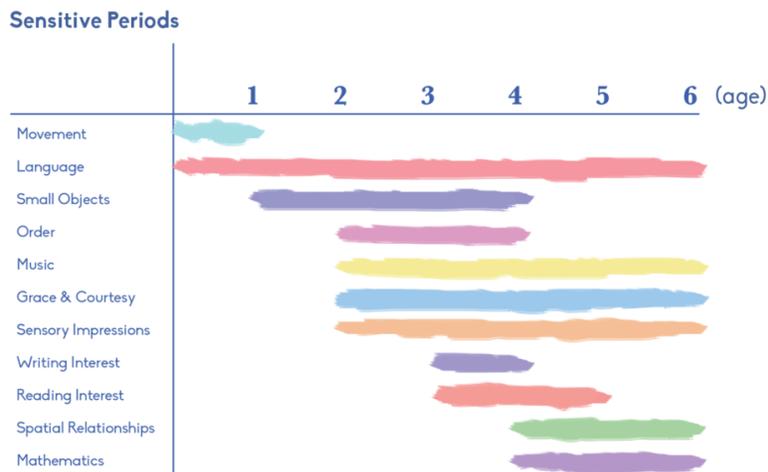
Practical life – The Montessori term that encompasses “domestic” work to maintain the home and classroom environment; self-care and personal hygiene; and grace and courtesy. Practical life skills are of great interest to young children and form the basis of later abstract learning.

Practical life activities – Young children in Montessori classrooms learn to take care of themselves and their environment through activities such as hand washing, dusting, and mopping. These activities help toddlers and preschool-age children learn to work independently, develop concentration, and prepare for later work with reading and math; older children participate in more advanced activities such as cooking, gardening, and operating a business.

Prepared environment – The teacher prepares the environment of the Montessori classroom with carefully selected, aesthetically arranged materials that are presented sequentially to meet the developmental needs of the children using the space. Well-prepared Montessori environments contain appropriately sized furniture, a full complement of Montessori materials, and enough space to allow children to work in peace, alone, or in small or large groups.

Primary classroom – In some Montessori schools, this is a classroom for children ages 3 – 6 years; however, the American Montessori Society uses the term ‘Early Childhood’ and defines the age range as 2.5 – 6 years.

Sensitive period – A critical time during human development when the child is biologically ready and receptive to acquiring a specific skill or ability—such as the use of language or a sense of order—and is therefore particularly sensitive to stimuli that promote the development of that skill. A Montessori teacher prepares the environment to meet the developmental needs of each sensitive period.



Sensorial materials – Work with these materials develops and refines the 5 senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling—and builds a foundation for speech, writing, and math. Each scientifically designed material isolates a specific quality such as color, size, or shape. This focuses the child’s attention on this one characteristic, and teaches her to sort, classify, order, and develop vocabulary to describe objects she experiences in the world around her.

The 3-period lesson – A 3-step technique for presenting information to the child. In the first—the introduction or naming period—the teacher demonstrates what “this is.” (The teacher might say “This is a mountain” while pointing to it on a 3-dimensional map.) In the second—the association or recognition period—the teacher asks the child to “show” what was just identified (“Show me the mountain”). Finally, in the recall period, the teacher asks the child to name the object (“What is this?” she asks the child, while pointing to the mountain.) Moving from taking in new information, to passive recall, to active identification reinforces the child’s learning and demonstrates her mastery of the concept.

Work – Purposeful activity. Maria Montessori observed that children learn through purposeful activities of their own choosing. Montessori schools call all of the children’s activities “work.” While “work” sounds like a serious endeavor, Dr. Montessori observed that children exhibit joy and experience this purposeful activity as play.

Work cycle – Within the prepared environment of the Montessori classroom, children are taught to complete a work cycle which includes 1) choosing an activity; 2) completing the activity to completion (perhaps repeating the full sequence of the activity multiple times), cleaning up and returning the materials to the proper place; and 3) experiencing a sense of satisfaction to have fully completed the task.

APPENDIX B: History of Okemos Public Montessori in Okemos Public Schools

Okemos Public Montessori began with the passionate advocacy of former Wardcliff Elementary Principal Kathy Branch. Prior to joining the Okemos administration, Mrs. Branch had been introduced to the Montessori method during her experience as a principal at another public elementary school that housed a Montessori program. During the 2001-2002 school year, it was determined that there would be available classrooms at Wardcliff Elementary in which a pilot Montessori program might be possible. Okemos administrators, faculty, School Board members, and parents made numerous visits to other public Montessori schools and thoroughly explored this exciting educational opportunity. They were very impressed by the high quality of education that they observed in the public Montessori classrooms they visited, and concluded that Dr. Maria Montessori's teaching methods would be a wonderful alternative for students at Okemos Public Schools.

In the spring of 2002, the Okemos Board of Education voted unanimously to implement a Montessori program at Wardcliff Elementary for the 2002-2003 school year. The Okemos Public Montessori program began with one pre-primary classroom (3-5 year olds) and one classroom with kindergarten through 2nd grade learners. Shortly after, due to increased interest and growth, Okemos Public Montessori was relocated as a program alongside the traditional Central Elementary classrooms. The Montessori program consisted of two PPK classrooms (pre-primary 3-and 4-year olds and kindergarten learners), two lower elementary classrooms (students in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade), and 1 upper elementary classroom (students in 4th and 5th grade).

The Montessori program continued to grow and was relocated once again, this time to Edgewood Elementary for the 2005-2006 school year. The Montessori program's increased size allowed for a building of its own, and with this new home the program continued to grow. The program now included 3 PPK (pre-primary/kindergarten) classrooms, 5 lower elementary (1st-3rd gr.) classrooms, and 2 upper elementary (4th and 5th gr.) classrooms.

In 2008, the program was expanded once again to include an additional PPK classroom (4 total) and 2 additional upper elementary classrooms (4 total) at Edgewood. In addition, the first middle school (6th, 7th & 8th grade) classrooms were introduced within Kinawa Middle School.

With district restructuring in 2009-2010, the School Board voted to move Okemos Public Montessori back to the Central Elementary Building where the additional physical space would allow for continued growth. In the fall of 2010, Okemos Public Montessori returned to Central. Following the district reconfiguration, the Montessori program was reorganized to include four PPK classrooms, four lower elementary classrooms (1st and 2nd grades), and four upper elementary (3rd and 4th grade) classrooms. The middle school program expanded as well to include two sections (5th-6th grade) at Kinawa Middle School and two sections (7th-8th grade) at Chippewa Middle School. Since that time the programs at KMS and CMS have expanded to four sections at each building due to the increased student enrollment at Central.

The OPM elementary program was honored with the National Blue Ribbon award in 2016.