



Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read

December 16, 2025

Lori Waxter

Parent

Hello,

I spoke with the person in charge of this new possible charter school. Based on our conversation (and the fact that my daughter has special needs), I feel this school would really benefit my daughter Quinn and many other children. Please consider approving the charter. That would be really great and helpful. Thank you.

Lori Waxter

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025
Kiri Harper

Dear Members of the Pittsburgh Public School Board,

I am honored to share my support of Three Rivers Wildflower Public Charter School in the District.

My name is Kiri Harper and I live in Pittsburgh. I am a parent with 3 children aging 4-8 years old.

I was delighted to hear of the possibility of a Montessori school open as an additional educational initiative within the city. I am eager to see 3 Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School be a public school option in Pittsburgh because I believe in their educational philosophy. What this school symbolizes is the hope and accessibility that we long for.

I understand that PPS has a lot of challenges to work through right now, and that it is difficult to comprehend a new initiative which might appear to be outside the current struggles. I want to remind you of the vision that PPS has, and how Three Rivers Montessori fits in seamlessly with this. The school is welcoming so many, if not all, of the values and priorities of PPS. It stands by principles such as inclusion, equity, excellence, safety and the highest learning standards.

Stephanie Laine and Kevin Warren embody the type of people who are not only equipped and experienced, but motivated and available to start this model in Pittsburgh. They have a plethora of families standing beside them willing to support this approach. People who want the best for their children, and want to see the city, and all its residents, flourish.

The benefit to Pittsburgh children and families is huge. To families such as my own, who want to support a new initiative, but one that is rooted in research-backed methods, and who want to be a part of building a future and community in the Northside, this model is pivotal.

3 Rivers Wildflower Montessori are unapologetic in their commitment to center Black and Brown students and to activate the assets and strengths of the neighborhoods where they will design identity-affirming Montessori environments. I am not from Pittsburgh, other than the USA, and what I see in this model is an approach that I want to get behind.

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025

What I appreciate the most about the mission and vision of 3 Rivers their commitment to engaging families in the classroom as employees, as volunteers, and as recipients of community-based supports. The Three Rivers Wildflower model is innovative in this and in their integration of community and family elders. 3 Rivers Wildflower will enhance community connections and trust where residents are active parts of their community and thrive as individuals. The Three Rivers model ensures that children cultivate an identity rooted in their community and family history. As families and community members, we support a culturally relevant education model that is proven to reduce disparities and contribute to a lifelong love of learning and quality of life. This is how we can transform out currently discouraged and disenfranchised communities. This is how the city can support families and parents. This is how we help to find solutions for issues such as school deserts and geographical challenges.

In conclusion, I am delighted to support Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori's Charter application, and I hope you will approve access to high quality education for ALL of the children who don't currently have access.

Please do not hesitate me if you wish for any further information.

Many thanks,

Kiri Harper

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025
Rachel Masilamani

Dear Pittsburgh Public School Board Member,

I am reaching out to share my enthusiastic support for Three Rivers Wildflower Public Charter School in the District. As a parent and Pittsburgh city resident, I am confident that this new microscool model Montessori will empower Black and brown students in particular with a proven approach that is currently unavailable to them. The cohort of children currently in the district have been adversely impacted by instability and deepening inequality around the Covid-19 pandemic. It is time to invest deeply and with care in our most vulnerable students.

From preschool through 6th grade, I had the privilege of attending a Montessori school in New Jersey that centered the method applied with fidelity to Maria Montessori's approach. Maria Montessori created her approach initially for children with learning disabilities, recognizing their shared humanity and consistent alignment with developmental milestones, despite their differences. By incorporating scientific observation into classroom design, she created diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environments for all types of learners, long before these became buzzwords. Her model emphasizes self-sufficiency, experimentation, reading, critical thinking, and respectful community building. It transcends language and economic status by tapping into the abilities and interests we share. All over the world, from wealthy suburbs, like the one I grew up in, to slum communities in India and Brazil, and in public charters in US cities, Montessori students thrive. Students carry the self-confidence and caring they learned with them for the rest of their lives.

A casual observer may believe that students in PPS already have access to a Montessori education through the magnet school in Friendship. I thought this too when I enrolled my son there in 2018. Unfortunately, it became clear that this school does not offer Montessori with fidelity. The method is interrupted by worksheets, ineffective curriculum, and classes separating "specials" from the whole school approach. Children on IEPs (gifted and otherwise) are frequently separated from the general classroom, destabilizing the sense of community necessary for all to succeed together.

As a former Montessori student myself, I was disappointed to find that teachers in the Friendship school were expected to deliver the regular PPS curriculum, phasing out more and more of the method at each grade. The essential elements of the method (specialized materials, mixed age classrooms) were treated as window dressing. There appeared to be little awareness that upper elementary, middle school and even high school students benefit from the practical life skills and Montessori philosophy in action. When I asked the principal why my son was not getting the Montessori education I had chosen for him, I was told that Montessori was supplemental to the core curriculum - something like an elective to consider if time allowed.

"What does it matter?" the casual observer might ask. "PPS Montessori has the highest reading scores in the district, so they must be doing something right." Again, I urge you to dig deeper into

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read

December 16, 2025

the statistics we all have access to regarding PSSA scores and student demographics. PPS Montessori is majority white in a majority Black district. The small percentage of Black students there are not keeping pace with white students in the school or across the district- remaining about 20 percentage points behind white PPS students in ELA proficiency and about 25 percentage points behind white PPS students in Math proficiency. Why are so few Black families choosing this school? Why Haven't Black children at the school shown improved test scores?

Maria Montessori's approach has had a deep history in Pittsburgh's Homewood neighborhood, developing a truly diverse and balanced community based in a majority Black neighborhood. Moving Montessori from Homewood to Friendship, and now to Point Breeze/Squirrel Hill while abandoning the proven classroom model bit by bit has left Black and brown families without options to participate with ease. The current teacher population at the school in Friendship is 95% white - delivering the message to all students on a daily basis that Black teachers are an anomaly. The neighborhood location requires very young children to be bussed or driven to the school by families.

There is more evidence than ever that Montessori with fidelity can set low income Black and brown children up for success. As PPS seeks a scientifically proven method to teach reading, we need not look farther than Maria Montessori's early phonics approach and sensory materials. The missing piece for Black and brown students in Pittsburgh today, is that Montessori is not available in their home communities in a whole school model. Also, in the Pittsburgh area, the method with fidelity is only available in private Montessori schools at a steep price.

The solution to these inequities is the neighborhood microschool design that Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori offers. The direct centering of Black families' well being and community connection is essential and unparalleled in PPS. I have complete confidence in the professional team of educators who will form the core of this new school.

I hope you will approve access to high quality education for all of the students who do not have access in their home communities, and should not have to leave their neighborhoods to be welcomed to an effective school.

I've linked to a few recent articles outlining the value of Montessori with fidelity to the method to provide evidence and context for my support for Three Rivers Montessori and its approach. Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions about my support.

Sincerely,
Rachel Masilamani

412-216-8876

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025

Selected articles to provide an overview of the Montessori method and the importance of fidelity for student success.

Preschool children's development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs,

Angeline S. Lillard

Journal of School Psychology,

Volume 50, Issue 3, 2012,

Pages 379-401,

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2012.01.001>.

Seeking Racial and Ethnic Parity in Preschool Outcomes: An Exploratory Study of Public Montessori Schools vs. Business-as-Usual Schools

Angeline S. Lillard; Xin Tong; Paige M. Bray

Grantee Submission, Journal of Montessori Research Volume 9, Issue 1, 2023

Pages 16-36

<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED661837>

The Challenges and Opportunities of Implementing Montessori Education in the Public Sector

David J. Fleming; Brooke Taylor Culclasure; Hannah Warren; Ginny Riga

Journal of Montessori Research and Education

Volume 4, Issue 1, 2023

Pages: 1–16

<https://journalofmore.org/articles/10.16993/jmre.19>

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025

Michelle McDonald

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter in full support of the opening of a Montessori school in our community. I am a parent of twins who are currently in the 7th grade, and we live on the Northside of Pittsburgh. Although our home school is close to where we live, I have chosen not to send my children there due to the lack of resources and opportunities available to support their academic and social growth.

As a parent, I want my children to be in a learning environment that values them as individuals, challenges them academically, and supports their emotional development. From what I have learned about Montessori education, I believe it can truly work and be good for our community, real world experiences while learning are what life is all about. I remember when I was in middle school, we had classes like home economics, and wood shop. Many middle schools unless deemed special offer things like that nowadays when it used to be common.

I strongly believe that this Montessori school would be a positive addition to the Northside community. Families deserve access to high-quality educational options, especially in areas that have historically been underserved. Providing another choice for families like mine helps ensure that students are not limited by their zip code.

I fully support this school. These values align with what I want for my children and for the future of our community. I hope you will consider the benefits this school could bring to families who are seeking meaningful and educational opportunities.

Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,
Michelle McDonald

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025

Alaya Berry

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my full support for the opening of The Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori School. As a mother of young African American boys living in the city of Pittsburgh, I believe in this school and everything it represents would be a tremendous asset to both the Pittsburgh community and the surrounding areas.

I only recently began learning about the Montessori approach, and I am truly amazed by the possibilities this method creates for children. A good friend of mine reached out to share information about the school and asked for my support. When he first mentioned Montessori teaching, I thought I had a general idea of what it meant. However, as he explained the philosophy more deeply, especially the focus on nurturing the whole child I quickly realized that I had not understood how meaningful and transformative true Montessori education can be.

While I'm not yet sure if my own children will have the opportunity to attend this school, I do know this: if my friend is involved and is asking for my support, then this is a project grounded in strong values and purpose. From what I have already learned, it is clear that everyone working to bring this school to life is doing so with the right intentions, a commitment to equity, and a genuine desire to create a better educational future for our children.

I would be more than willing to speak over the phone if additional support or clarification is needed.

With positive thoughts and sincere support,

Alaya Berry

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025

Ms. Austi Williams

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the opening of The Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori School. As a mother of a 6th-grade daughter who attends a Pittsburgh Public School, I believe that a program like this would be an incredible asset to families across the city. The vision, values, and educational philosophy behind this school have the potential to bring something truly meaningful to our community.

I was encouraged to learn more about this initiative by a close friend of mine, who is already an exceptionally dedicated teacher, someone who cares deeply about the success, well-being, and future of every child he encounters. When he asked if I would be willing to write a letter of support, I did not hesitate. His commitment to education, combined with the mission of this emerging school, assured me that this is a project worth standing behind.

Before speaking with him, I was only somewhat familiar with Montessori education. I thought I understood the basics, but as he shared more about the approach the focus on child-centered learning, independence, and creativity I realized how powerful and impactful this method can be. The more I learned, the more convinced I became that true Montessori school rooted in inclusivity and community would greatly benefit Pittsburgh's children and families.

I wholeheartedly believe in the positive impact it could have on students across our city. From everything I have seen and heard, The Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori School is being built with integrity, purpose, and a genuine desire to uplift children and support their growth in every way.

If you have any further questions about my support feel free to contact me.

With sincere appreciation,

Ms. Austi Williams



Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025
Lori Waxter

Hello,

I spoke with the person in charge of this new possible charter school. Based on our conversation (and the fact that my daughter has special needs), I feel this school would really benefit my daughter Quinn and many other children. Please consider the charter. That would be really great and helpful. Thank you.

Lori Waxter



Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025
Sherry Warren

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing as a member of a community that has lost all of its PPS schools, to express my full support for the opening of a Montessori school in the Pittsburgh area. I strongly believe in the importance of providing children with a high-quality education that supports not only academic growth, but also social, emotional, and moral development.

I was recently introduced to what a Montessori education can offer through my nephew, who has been involved in helping to bring this school to life. Through the information he shared, I have learned about the focus on individualized learning and respect for diversity. These are values I believe are essential for raising a thoughtful and responsible new generation.

I am also very aware of the disproportionate services and resources currently available within Pittsburgh Public Schools. Too often, children in less fortunate areas do not have access to the same educational opportunities as others. Providing additional options, such as a Montessori school, can help address these gaps and give families more choices that meet their children's needs.

Opening this Montessori school would be a positive step toward creating more equitable educational opportunities and strengthening our communities as a whole.

Thank you for considering my support.

Sincerely,

Ms. Sherry Warren

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025
Thom Burns

"Our brains are wired for connection, but trauma rewires them for protection. That's why healthy relationships are difficult for wounded people."

Beneath every behavior there is a feeling. And beneath every feeling there is a need. And when we meet that need rather than focus on the behavior, we begin to deal with the cause, not the symptom.

Special Education Doesn't mean that a student is incapable of learning. It means that they may need different supports in order to succeed.

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read

December 16, 2025

Becca Peluso

Written Testimony in Support of the Proposed Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School Led

To the Members of the School Board:

My name is Becca Peluso, and I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the approval of the proposed Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter led by Stephanie Lapine. I submit this testimony as a former teacher in Pittsburgh Public Schools and as someone who now works with educators across the country to improve access to high-quality learning for all students—especially those who have historically been underserved.

I care deeply about ensuring that every child has access to best-in-class educational resources. In my experience as both an educator and a parent, there is no instructional model more powerful for nurturing independence, confidence, and deep learning than Montessori education—particularly for students from communities that have not traditionally had access to these opportunities. There is also, quite simply, no one more qualified or more deserving to lead this initiative than Stephanie Lapine. She was my child’s teacher for many years, and under her care, my child flourished in ways I could not have imagined. Stephanie teaches with profound respect, empathy, and intentionality. She treats every student with dignity, sees their individual strengths, and creates an environment where children feel safe to grow. Her commitment to service is evident in everything she does, and I know she would extend that same level of care to every family and student who walks through the doors of this school.

Our city needs more Montessori programs—programs that honor the whole child, that provide small, attentive learning environments, and that actively work to close gaps in access. While we are fortunate to have one public Montessori school, it cannot meet the current demand, nor can it serve all the communities who would benefit from this approach. This proposed school would not compete with existing programs; rather, it would complement and strengthen our city’s educational landscape by offering something truly unique and deeply needed.

I urge you to approve Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School. Doing so would expand access to a proven, student-centered model of learning and allow an extraordinary educator to serve the children who need it most. Our city’s students deserve more opportunities to flourish—and this school would provide exactly that.

Thank you for your consideration.



Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025

Sincerely,
Becca Peluso
Director of Online Professional Learning, AP Programs, CollegeBoard

Pittsburgh Public Schools Special Public Hearing Three Rivers Wildflower Montessori Charter School
Testimonies Submitted Not Read
December 16, 2025
Cheryl Palmer

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in my support of the Three Rivers Wildflower charter schools. As a certified Montessori teacher I have seen first hand the impact this type of educational program has on the students enrolled. The curriculum is designed to support the children in each of their developmental stages with expertise and precision. Their brain development as well as where they are socially and emotionally at each stage was taken fully into account by Dr. Montessori when creating this teaching method. The hands-on materials and self-paced journey through the classwork support both the individual learning styles and the ability for students to use reciprocal teaching with their peers.

Children are able to revisit materials for extra practice and review and much of the shelf-work present in the classroom is self checking; promoting a child's confidence and self-esteem. Students are able to pursue their interests and natural curiosity which promotes a greater investment and involvement in their education.

The practical life experiences of a Montessori program give children an opportunity to grow their life skills at a young age and to build their knowledge of helping others. This grows into a spirit of entrepreneurship which enables students to learn valuable, functional work lessons and create future success in careers. This teaches them how to care for the environment, others and themselves in ways which are often needed in today's times.

The large number of applicants for the Montessori magnet program shows a need for more of these schools in the Pittsburgh area. There are no Montessori programs in the most impoverished neighborhoods.

These schools have been shown to close the achievement gap across demographics. Students deserve more opportunities and school choice. The 3RW schools would offer a new option for communities that can use them the most. All students deserve a choice in attending Montessori schools. They deserve a different approach to education that could benefit not only the individual students but could also help the future of their communities for generations.

I am hopeful for the growth of these programs for our students' sake.

Sincerely,
Cheryl Palmer