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PHOTOS: Front, Jimmy Cheng. Others, Frida Azari, Valley Montessori School.



Montessori: The Kindergarten Year



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Your preschooler has been thriving in his first two years of Montessori Early Childhood education—and then year three comes along. As the kindergarten year approaches—the third and final year of the Early Childhood cycle—you may feel unsure about whether to keep him in his current school or switch to a kindergarten experience in a traditional private or public school setting.

Here are some questions parents frequently ask about this important decision.

Why should I continue my child's education at a Montessori school for the kindergarten year?

In the carefully prepared environment that is the Montessori classroom, your child is presented with countless opportunities to develop all her senses and motor skills through the use of learning materials that are unique to Montessori schools. During the third year in the Early Childhood class, she will be able to work with these materials in increasing depth, allowing her to continue to advance in the academic areas the materials support.

Already, your child has spent two years learning from older children, sharing with peers, and helping younger children. In the third year—as one of the oldest members of the class—he will be poised to assume a vital and empowering leadership role at school and in the classroom.

During the Montessori kindergarten year, critical learning skills that lay the groundwork for later academic work and social/emotional development deepen. These skills are carefully nurtured during the first two years of the Early Childhood cycle. They include: concentration, self-discipline, a sense of order, persistence in completing a task, and creative self-expression. The Montessori Early Childhood environment also fosters a thirst for knowledge that continues to bloom in the kindergarten year, preparing children to be eager, self-motivated learners in elementary school and beyond.

How will my child, as an older member of the class, be exposed to new opportunities for challenge and growth?

During the third year in a Montessori environment, children continue to develop and learn at their own pace, allowing for cognitive development based on a firm foundation of sensory and motor-skill training built during the previous two years. A transition to in-depth academic work occurs naturally during the three-year Early Childhood cycle. A child who is ready will begin reading and working with more advanced and abstract math materials and will embark on other academic activities, too. Because Montessori classroom materials are used sequentially, in the third year your child will gain full comprehension of the concepts she has been exploring during the previous two years.

Won't it be easier for my child to adjust to a traditional public or private school at the kindergarten level rather than in first grade?

The experience of being the oldest in the Montessori class will give your child great confidence and self-assurance. This third-year experience will help if he transitions to a new school as a first-grader. Without the Montessori kindergarten year's opportunities for leadership, your child would miss this valuable opportunity for growth.

Many parents, after witnessing a child's progress during the Montessori kindergarten year, decide to enroll in a Montessori elementary program. But whether your child continues on to a Montessori or a traditional elementary environment, the gains made during the Montessori kindergarten year will lead to social and academic confidence in later years.

Will my child get enough experience working in groups in a Montessori classroom to become a successful group member in first grade?

A visit to any quality Montessori school will show that considerable collaborative work and productive socializing take place naturally in the classroom. The Montessori environment promotes self-regulation, which helps children behave in a socially responsible manner.

The Montessori approach allows children to develop self-discipline by encouraging them to follow carefully chosen and mutually agreed upon classroom rules that are consistently reinforced. Children learn to help one another, to care for one another, and to care for their environment. They are free to talk and move around the learning environment and are treated with respect. As a result, they develop the emotional and cognitive skills required for successful cooperative work.

After three years in a Montessori school, will my child be bored in first grade?

Not at all! A Montessori education cultivates highly motivated students with a true love of learning. A child with a positive attitude toward school is inspired to learn in any environment. Montessori Early Childhood graduates are curious, self-disciplined, and socially responsible learners who become valued members of their new school communities. Teachers of students who have transitioned from Montessori schools frequently comment on the confidence, curiosity, and independence exhibited by the Montessori students in their classes.

How do I explain to my child my decision in favor of Montessori kindergarten?

You can help your child accept and feel comfortable with your family's decision. As parents, you are your child's primary role models at this age. You can be a stronger influence than neighborhood playmates. If you discuss your doubts within earshot of your child, she will be quick to reflect your mixed feelings. But if you feel positive and confident about the choice to have her remain in a Montessori school for the kindergarten year, she will feel that way, too. Talk about how your child will be able to continue the friendships developed during the first two years in the Montessori classroom. How lucky she is to be going back for a third year to be a leader for the younger children!

Enrolling your child in Montessori kindergarten—the third year of the three-year Montessori Early Childhood cycle—is a gift that will last a lifetime.