



Charter Schools and Montessori: An Alternative Look at Public Education

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"The mission of the California Montessori Project (CMP) is to offer a quality, tuition-free Montessori education to every child in the state of California." CMP started as a vision. Now in its sixth year of operation, CMP offers a dynamic, public school alternative that is based on the philosophy and teachings of Dr. Maria Montessori. On the eve of the 100th anniversary of Montessori education, CMP is proud to be a leader in making Montessori widely available to all who choose.

California Montessori is a K-8 charter school network currently operating five public Montessori schools throughout Sacramento and El Dorado counties. Public charters are receiving a lot of attention these days as parents look for alternatives to traditional public education, yet many people still lack the understanding of what a charter school is.

Chartered public schools are the result of grassroots advocacy within the education reform movement and are authorized in the State of California under legislation authored by former Senator Gary Hart in 1992. Chartered schools offer the opportunity for the development of cutting edge educational choices for families where administrators can be innovative, teachers can be creative, and students can be excited about coming to school. Like all public schools, charter schools are free, non-sectarian, and open to anyone who wishes to apply. Additionally, these schools characteristically exhibit a high degree of parental involvement, are student centered, and measure outcomes based on student performance. Because of the unique nature of chartered schools, they are held to a higher level of accountability.

Until the emergence of the charter school movement, Montessori philosophies and methodologies have been mainly available only to those families who were able to afford a private school education, with the focus primarily on early childhood (ages 2 ½ to 6) and lower elementary (ages 6-9). The founders of the California Montessori Project had a vision to make Montessori education available to *all* children, regardless of socioeconomic demographics. Dr. Maria Montessori opened the first children's house to serve the needs of underprivileged and academically challenged children. With this in mind, the founders of CMP hope to perpetuate Dr. Montessori's original intent. That is not to say that Montessori education is only for struggling students! With over five years of operation under its belt, the CMP curriculum team has spent countless hours assuring the school's curriculum addresses and exceeds both Montessori and California state standards. That is only the beginning.

The well-prepared Montessori environment enables students to become educated to high international academic standards and encourages the development of young men and women who are competent, productive individuals contributing positively to their families and communities. This is partly due to the fact that Montessori materials create an international language all their own. A Montessori student can enter a well prepared Montessori classroom in any country around the world and know exactly what to do, engaging in meaningful work regardless of the native language spoken. The materials and lessons provide multi-modal intellectual stimulation at a wide range of academic levels. Individualized work plans allow a child to work at his or her own ability and foster independence and responsibility. Students working at their own pace are not held back by the rest of their learning community. In this way, the Montessori environment inherently addresses the needs of accelerated students, at-promise students and all those in-between. Dr. Maria Montessori's specialized approach encourages life long learning with an understanding of the world in which the child lives. Montessori's ultimate goal was to prepare the child for the real world based on a philosophy of trust that individuals innately seek their own highest levels of achievement. That is what Montessori is all about: First hand experience as students learn about their world.

Young children with early Montessori foundations (age 2-6) typically enter the public school system academically ahead of their non-Montessori peers and are working in a more independent, self-directed, organized fashion. They take ownership of their learning through their daily tasks and accomplishments, and routinely express pride in "their work". Research studies have shown that students continuing their Montessori education