



Montessori Parent Aspirations & Motivations: Research Summary

In 2017, AMI undertook research in the United States to learn directly from Montessori parents. While a number of important insights were gained as to why parents choose Montessori and sometimes choose not to continue, three key areas stand out where AMI Montessori can provide the highest value: Helping children develop into capable individuals by focusing on their moral, behavioral, and emotional development; providing the highest quality teachers to facilitate that development; and, bringing parents into the Montessori experience so they can understand the process and aid in their child's growth.



Insights from this research prepare us to meet parents where they are with communications that will speak about the value Montessori provides to children, schools, parents, and society. The research was designed in two phases.

1. Five focus groups of Montessori parents explored thoughts and feelings about ideal child development and early childhood education.
2. A national online survey of 612 Montessori parents responded to concepts and language generated through the focus groups (45% of parents had Montessori birth to age six experience, 39% had Montessori ages six to 12 experience, and 16% had Montessori ages 12 to 18 experience). Almost half (49%) had a child currently enrolled in Montessori. The other half (51%) had a child who was previously enrolled.

Related research with non-Montessori parents explored many of the same questions about ideal child development and early childhood education through eight focus groups and a nationwide survey of 1,310 parents.

Key insights from our research about how to best communicate the value of Montessori education to parents are summarized here. Full research results are available through AMI.

Key Findings

A capable individual is the most valued outcome of childhood development for existing and potential Montessori parents.

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Montessori parents highly value their child's holistic development as the key to becoming capable individuals who will find internal fulfillment, professional productivity, and interpersonal connection throughout their lives. Fully three-quarters (76%) of Montessori parents and over a third (36%) of non-Montessori parents share a core perspective on ideal child development and the desired outcomes for their child, themselves, and society.

The most valued attributes of their child's development include:

- **Moral** (know right from wrong, respectful, kind, takes responsibility);
- **Behavioral** (able to complete a full day, pay attention, complete tasks, follow instructions, cooperate with peers, concentrate and focus); and,
- **Emotional** (confidence in self, internally motivated to learn, can say what they want/know/feel, confidence to explore).

The development attributes listed above are perceived to produce desired benefits for the child:

- **Inclusiveness** (more inclusive and accepting of others, respect themselves and others, encourages happiness and hope, well-rounded);
- **Real world readiness** (interact well with adults, prepared for the real world, well-behaved and polite, use good judgement, able to handle failure and rejection, build common sense, choose and make good friends);
- **Knowledge** (builds their intelligence, prepares them to excel academically);
- **Accountability** (self-discipline, take responsibility for their learning, handle conflict and disagreements, sense of self-worth, integrity); and,
- **Sense of Self** (creativity, self-expression, healthy relationships, sense of purpose, independence, sense of identity, independent thinker, motivation to contribute to community/society).

Parents value these attributes and associated benefits for their children from Montessori early childhood education because parents believe they lead to the development of a capable individual (competent, confident, focused, smart, secure, and empowered).

Becoming capable matters deeply to Montessori parents and potential Montessori parents because they believe that capability is a step on the path to becoming individuals who will enjoy lives built upon:

- **Fulfillment** (high self-esteem, truly happy with themselves, sense of belonging, enjoy life, inner peace, emotionally secure, fulfilled);
- **Productivity** (good employee or professional, productive work, financially secure); and,
- **Connection** (in a loving relationship, good parent, strong family, good friend, able to bond with others).

Parents experience validation, gratitude, relief, and pride as a result of their children's successful development into capable individuals.

These emotions are linked to aspirations to be good parents, pass on a legacy, and be in harmony with themselves and their family.

Teacher quality is the highest priority for parents when they are choosing programs for their children. They do not look for or derive meaning from Montessori school certifications, either AMI or AMS.



Fully 91% of Montessori parents indicated that the quality of teachers and staff was extremely or very important, compared to 82% who give the same level of importance to the specific educational approach and philosophy.

However, at the school level, only 1% of Montessori parents surveyed could self-identify their child's school as AMI certified and only 3% self-identify as parents of children in an AMS certified school. Yet, the reality is that 4% of respondents had children in AMI certified schools and 15% had children in AMS certified schools. This suggests that school certification is not a recognized or understood indicator of quality for parents and is a relatively low priority in their choice of schools.

An important strategy for increasing the relevance of AMI certification to parents is communicating the value of AMI teacher training and certification in ensuring quality teachers and AMI schools as settings where the best trained and prepared teachers are able to serve students and families.

Educational approach and school leaders and staff are important, but teacher quality and basic safety are the greatest priorities.

In addition to the 91% of parents who indicate teacher quality is a major factor in their program choices, another 91% indicated that safety of the school and the learning environment was similarly important. Quality of school leadership (83%), educational approach and philosophy (82%), teacher and staff stability (82%), and teacher training and certification (82%) are all in the second tier of priorities.

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Parents seek partners who will work with them to help their children develop into capable individuals.

Parents see their personal involvement with their child as a major focus in supporting their child's development (77% are present and spend quality time with them; 73% model good habits and healthy relationships; 66% include them in errands and activities; 65% provide hands-on toys and tools for learning; 65% provide structure and routines at home). Even though Montessori parents report relatively high satisfaction with their involvement in their child's education, one of the greatest satisfaction gaps they experience is feeling they are not as involved in their child's education as would be ideal.

Parents feel responsible for their children's successful development and make tremendous efforts and investments to support that development. Acknowledging the primacy of parents and demonstrating the value of Montessori as a partner gives parents the greatest confidence they will be successful in their role.

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Early childhood is the primary entry point into Montessori education.

71% of Montessori parents had enrolled their child in a Montessori program by age three. Fully 94% had done so by age six. Parents are most likely to discontinue Montessori at age four (20%) or five (28%), with 89% discontinuing before age nine. For parents, the most important outcome of ideal early childhood development is social safety. Social safety is characterized by better values—respect, tolerance, acceptance of diversity—and better behavior that reduces crime and increases safety.

Parents with very young children, birth to age four, are the priority audience for marketing and communications that will bring families and children into the Montessori community. This alignment reflects both the developmental needs of parents and young children and is a critical juncture for engagement.

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Compared to their peers, Montessori parents place more emphasis on enrolling their child in a pre-school program as a critical part of their support for their child's development. Visits with schools and teachers, combined with word-of-mouth, guide their program choice.

64% of Montessori parents indicate pre-school enrollment is a major focus, compared to 54% of non-Montessori parents when they describe what they do to support ideal childhood development. This priority also shows up in how they seek information about early learning experiences, as Montessori parents average 4.8 sources compared to 4.5 for non-Montessori parents.

Montessori parents are focused on program enrollment and are motivated to learn and understand. Our ability to communicate and educate effectively will be very productive for this receptive audience.

Parents are highly satisfied with their Montessori choice while their child is enrolled, but that appreciation diminishes when they discontinue Montessori.

85% of parents with a child currently enrolled rate themselves as highly satisfied, as do 75% of parents whose child was previously enrolled. Teacher quality is the highest component of satisfaction (83% for current students and 70% for former students). Over 70% of current parents rate themselves as highly satisfied on all specific dimensions: their involvement, classroom environment, child's development, communication with teacher and school, quality of school administrators, preparation for post-Montessori education, preparation for work, and value relative to cost of tuition. By comparison, only 55% of parents whose child was previously enrolled in Montessori are highly satisfied with the value for the cost; 61% with preparation for work; and 67% with preparation for education after Montessori.

Recognizing that children will eventually move into non-Montessori settings—if not for education, then for work and career—efforts to clearly establish the value of Montessori education as preparation for future successes is important to support peer-to-peer marketing of Montessori to parents.

Montessori parents' primary concerns about Montessori education revolve around a perception of insufficient rigor and structure in preparation for non-Montessori academic settings.

Almost all parents expect their child will face more direct external demands on their time in the future than they do within a Montessori education, and they worry about their child's preparation to meet those realities in school or work. Concerns about specific academic preparation in math, science, and technology also exist. In addition, there are social considerations as many parents seek a “mainstream” public education setting with peers in local communities and the accompanying network of friendships, athletics, and other group extracurricular opportunities.

As parents fail to appreciate the intentionality and rigor of Montessori, communicating the ways in which current Montessori experiences prepare children to successfully meet external demands across both academic and social domains will help them take a longer-term perspective on the value of Montessori.