



Testimony Concerning SB 533
Education-Teacher Certification-Montessori Schools
Submitted to Education Health and Environmental Affairs
February 18, 2020

Position: Support

As a longtime resident of Prince George's County and knowing the significant waitlists our Montessori programs struggle with, I was thrilled when the third county Montessori school opened in 2010. Montessori education offers students from all backgrounds an excellent academic foundation while also fostering social emotional skills and instilling vital 21st century competencies such as collaboration, interdisciplinary learning, and independence. However, our Montessori programs face significant hurdles due to the lack of a pathway to state teacher certification for Montessori trained teachers; the passage of SB 533 is critical to ensuring that Maryland's public Montessori schools have the highly qualified teachers our children deserve.

As a former Montessori school administrator, I know how vital it is to have properly trained teachers in all Montessori classrooms. Montessori certification ensures that teachers know how to work with the specific Montessori age groupings, scaffold instruction and individualize it to each child's needs, offer lessons on the classroom's unique hands on materials, and optimize the classroom environment so that children build confidence, critical thinking skills, and self-discipline alongside their academic pursuits.

As the Executive Director of the Montessori Public Policy Initiative I am privy to the national landscape of Montessori education. Currently 10 states have recognized the rigor of Montessori teacher preparation and have created a pathway to state teacher certification. South Carolina, the first to create such a pathway, currently has 44 public Montessori programs across 22 districts. A recent 5-year study of those schools showed that participation in Montessori reduced student achievement gaps and that Montessori students experienced significantly greater achievement growth in ELA, math, and social studies than demographically matched non-Montessori students. All of the classrooms in that study had a properly trained Montessori teacher.

We want to ensure that children in Maryland's public schools have appropriately qualified staff, which is why ensuring that our public Montessori programs can hire Montessori trained teachers is so critical. Individuals that have a bachelor's degree plus a Montessori credential from program accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) or affiliated with AMS or AMI have completed a program which includes a rigorous graduate level course of study that includes child-development, level specific subject matter, curriculum, instructional planning, assessment, family partnership, supports for learning differences and culturally responsive teaching in addition to a significant student teaching component.

Because of the lack of a pathway to certification, Maryland's Montessori programs are frequently unable to recruit teachers who have gone through this rigorous Montessori training and must hire licensed teachers and then send them to training. This means our students and families are not getting the full benefits of a Montessori setting and schools must dedicate both financial resources to send teachers to get their training and administrative resources to support teachers who are in a classroom environment they are not trained to teach in.

The passage of SB 533 will not only help ensure students in our Montessori schools have highly qualified staff, it will make conventionally trained teachers who are currently working in Montessori schools available for open positions elsewhere in the state system, thereby reducing the state's need to recruit teachers from out of state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Wendy" followed by a stylized flourish.

Wendy Shenk-Evans
Executive Director