Introduction to Montessori advocacy & public policy - Landscape

The leaders in early childhood education and policy makers across this country have embarked on an extraordinary, unprecedented effort, making Early Learning & Development of the young child a national priority. The President, White House Initiatives, Governors and State Leadership Teams have demonstrated widespread awareness of and commitment to early care & education as a major contributing factor to future economic success for all children, families and the country. Policy makers in every state now recognize the high return on investment, future college and career success, and strong reliance working families have on quality care.

Over the past decade there has been slow yet steady progress towards surging changes in the field of Early Childhood. This activity began with mandates given to states by the Federal Government related to quality. These changes, while incremental, have increasingly received the attention of the Montessori Community. In 2014, there have been significant additional federal and state commitments made through grants, partnerships, and policy changes that already have and will continue to expedite this activity, its impact, and our collective outcomes.

In the majority of ECE related policy activity we have taken reassurance, an increasing focus on quality only underscores the Montessori Communities’ commitment to serve children well. We also learned our programs were not always well understood by those without similar background and training. In some cases, it meant our specialized methods did not translate well under traditional examination, outcomes were not readily recognized, and conceptually (while we wanted the same things) we learned to communicate our dissimilar means for attaining equally beneficial results.

Beginning with the Strong Start for America’s Children Act and continued through Preschool for All, Early Head Start Partnership and Expansion Grants, The Quality Charter School Act, Preschool Development Grants, Quality Rating and Improvement Systems, in 2014 alone, we have experienced activity in policy, grants, partnership and growth at an unprecedented level. The Montessori Communities’ participation in shaping, responding to, and utilizing these developments provides an exceptional opportunity to fortify community footholds by schools, parents, children, teachers, etc. making Montessori Education accessible to more children, validating our own efforts and increasing understanding of what makes Montessori Education so inherently valuable.

This is where the adventure began; it represents an exciting moment in Montessori history, in this country. We are now using our spectacular community-organizing power to communicate, influence and participate in policy developments in ways and levels previously not accessed. As the White House and State Governments have taken hold
of the reins on Early Childhood Quality, Access and Expansion, it is now, more than ever, our mission to steer their momentum.

**Introduction to Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI)**

In the Spring of 2012, AMI/USA conducted a pilot Montessori coalition in six states; with the assistance of Jaye Espy. By 2013, it had grown to 20 states. This effort included webinars, state support, and steady opportunities for policy participation. As advocacy efforts (and the need for them) grew, leadership for both the Association Montessori International/USA and the American Montessori Society began to work together to strengthen and unify the Montessori Communities' response to widespread early childhood policy developments.

By the Winter of 2013, the Montessori Public Policy Initiative was underway to serve as a platform for collaboration and coordination of efforts on behalf of the membership in AMI/USA and AMS. In Early 2014, an Executive Council was established, comprised of the Executive Directors of both organizations and two additionally appointed members. Two part-time staff were hired, a Representative Forum was created and organizational structure followed.

The work started under MPPI has only begun to organize and connect our active and involved community members. As MPPI’s organizational structure solidifies, and as state coalitions across the country build their foundations, we can expect unique opportunities for Montessori interests and investments to continue to grow exponentially.

**Montessori Public Policy Initiative Mission Statement:**

- Our mission is to create a groundswell of activism through the establishment and support of grassroots advocacy coalitions, working together toward the shared goal of advancing Montessori through public consensus, shared interests, and efforts at the local, state and federal levels of public policy.

**Montessori Public Policy Initiative Vision Statement:**

- Through coordination and collaboration with national organizations and state coalitions, the Montessori Public Policy Initiative will support high quality Montessori Education through advocacy activity, research, projects and information sharing, advocating Montessori as a leader in the national debate on educational policy.

**Online Organizations for More Information**
1. **Early Care and Education Consortium (ECEC)**, an advocacy based, non-profit organization representing over 7,400 licensed centers across all 50 states. They are an excellent resource for policy updates, awareness and calls for action. [http://www.ececonsortium.org/](http://www.ececonsortium.org/)

2. **Zero to Three Policy Center** is a resource for research, policy and advocacy, particularly as it pertains to children in the birth to three range. Their Policy Center advances public policy solutions and investments for the health and development of very young children and their families. In doing so, the Policy Center synthesizes and disseminates knowledge, cultivates advocacy leadership, and engages policymakers. [http://www.zerotothree.org/public-policy/](http://www.zerotothree.org/public-policy/)

3. **National Women’s Law Center (NWLC)** is a non-profit organization founded in 1972 to expand possibilities for women and girls in the U.S. A particularly helpful section is devoted to Early Childhood Issues and provides research, advocacy toolkits, and policy updates with abstracts and summaries. [http://www.nwlc.org/our-issues/child-care-%2526-early-learning](http://www.nwlc.org/our-issues/child-care-%2526-early-learning)

4. **National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)** are the authors of the annual “State of Preschool” publication. They have information related to Early Learning Access, Assessment, Economics, English Language Learners, Accountability, Outcomes, Quality & Curriculum, Special education, State Pre-K Evaluations and more. They are a rich resource for up-to-date research and information. [http://nieer.org/](http://nieer.org/)

5. **National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP)** is a public policy center dedicated to promoting economic security, health and well-being of America’s Low-Income families and children. NCCP Uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation at state and national levels. Among many types of tools, they have a “50 State Policy Tracker” Tool that can be used to create comparison tables between states. [http://www.nccp.org/](http://www.nccp.org/)

6. **Office of the Administration of Children & Families: Early Childhood Development (ACF)** offers a plethora of links to more information related to federal initiatives, grants, and policy. Here, one can use a link to look up State Early Childhood and Regional Contacts across the country. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd)

7. **Council for American Private Education (CAPE)** has a selection of policy briefs and does an excellent job tracking, responding to and advocating on behalf of private schools, teachers, children and families (including Montessori related-issues). To gain more language and insight on responding to policy their public policy section is informative. [http://www.capenet.org/pubpol.html](http://www.capenet.org/pubpol.html)

8. **Child Care Aware (CCA)** is designed to be an information hub for parents and child care providers. They also work with more than 600 state and local Child Care Resource & Referral agencies nationwide. They have multiple State by State Resources that lists items for every state; for example, Points of Contact for State
Assistance, State Regulations, State Fact Sheets, State specific Quality Rating Improvement Systems, Help Explaining Quality to Parents, etc.
http://childcareaware.org/node/1405

Resources for Accessing More Information:

• Want to learn more about what child care looks like in your state (cost, use, supply, workforce, family characteristics)? The following link opens a PDF document with state specific child care breakouts, current for 2014.
http://usa.childcareaware.org/sites/default/files/19000000_state_fact_sheets_2014_v04.pdf

• Have you wondered what the Early Childhood Workforce looks like, across the country (educational attainment, average wages, experience)? This document, released in Nov. 2013, is from the Administration of Children & Families Health & Human Services Division.
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/opre/nsece_wf_brief_102913_0.pdf

• What does State-Funded Preschool Look like across the country? The 2013 State of Preschool will give you information such as what percentage of children in your state attend state-funded PreK?  http://nieer.org/publications/state-preschool-2013

• June 2014 White House Fact Sheets explaining, state by state, how the President’s plan will provide high-quality preschool for all 4 year olds, invest in high-quality infant and toddler development, and expand effective parent and family support. http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ecd/news/white-house-releases-state-fact-sheets-on-president-obamas-early-learning

• Not sure about advocacy efforts? The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development have published online an Advocacy Guide with information about getting started and working with key allies and resources.

• Want more information about your state’s Quality Ratings and Improvement Program or updates on developments happening with QRIS in your state? This link, provided by the QRIS National Learning Network opens an excel sheet with access to your state’s information/website.

Articles related to Early Childhood Policy & Advocacy

1. Looking for a concise update on Federal and State Policy Activity? This is a 2p summary on Grant, Partnership and Policy Developments from the past six
2. What is QRIS and what does it have to do with me? This is a 3p Resource Guide published by the National Office of Child Care. https://ohspanelreviewer.info/UserFiles/1401_Chapter_1_IntroductionQRIS.pdf


Recent Advocacy Advances

- March 2014, Montessori Public Policy Initiative supports an interagency collaboration to advocate for Montessori Opportunity in a Call for Public Comment on the Preschool Development Grants. To watch the call for public comment, click here. (One hour total, see sections at 6:30, 29:00, 38:15, 41:40, 60:00)
- April 2014, The Montessori Schools of Connecticut join forces with the Connecticut Childcare Association to amend legislation (SB 25+26), resulting in the inclusion of nationally accredited institutional recognition in addition to the NAEYC accreditation, completion of a needs assessment prior to opening new programs in public schools, and partnering with private providers to provide access for low-income children.
- May 2014, The Oregon Montessori Association works directly with the Oregon Professional Recognition Registry to recognize accredited Montessori Training at a level equivalent to 27 college credits and recognizes degree completion with a Montessori Endorsement.
- June 2014, Montessori Public Policy Initiative supported the expansion of the Montessori Advocacy Coalitions to an additional 12 states making the new total 32 confirmed and growing state coalitions.
- July 2014, Ohio passes HB 487, with the help of David Khan and Phil Dosman, allowing State Teaching Licensure for ages 0-5 to those holding a Montessori Credential from AMI/USA or AMS.
Just The Facts

Being directly involved in the field of early education, in advocacy efforts and policy developments is one important way to perpetuate Montessori Education; another is being knowledgeable about the context in which early childhood policies develop, understanding what the landscape looks like, and sharing this information with others. Here are a few details to get you started!

Workforce

- In 2013, 2.2 million individuals earned a living caring for children under the age of five. Their average income was $21,490 in 2013. (Child Care Aware).
- An additional 2.7 million unpaid individuals cared for non-related children, at least five hours each week. (DHHS)
- The median hourly wage for center-based teachers of children Ages 0-3 was $9.30 and for Ages 3-5 were $11.90. (DHHS)
- The median wage by educational attainment broke down as follows: $14.70 for BA or above, $11.00 AA Degree, $9.30 for Some College, $9.00 HS Education or less. (DHSS)
- The national average fee for full-time care in a center (for 4-year-olds) is $4,515-$12,320 and in full-time center-based care for Infants is $5,476-$16,549. (Child Care Aware)

Educational Requirements

- 31 States require a high school diploma or less for child care Center Lead Teachers and 41 States have this requirement or less for Family Child Care Providers. (DHHS)
- For Teachers and Caregivers of Preschool Aged children, 45% report having a BA or higher, 17% have an AA, 24% have some college but no degree, and 13% have a HS Education or less. (DHSS)
- For Teachers and Caregivers of Infants and Toddlers, 19% reported having a BA or higher, 17% have an AA, 36% have some college but no degree, and 28% have a HS Education or less. (DHSS)

State Funded PreK

- In 2014, 60% of center-based teachers and caregivers worked in programs with no sponsorship from Head Start or Public PreK; only 6% were in school-based settings. 35% worked in centers receiving sponsorship from Head Start or Public PreK funds. (DHHS)
- In 2012-2013, 28% of all four-year-olds and 4% of all three-year-olds were served by State-Funded PreK. (NIEER)
• 2014, “States have reduced their preschool roles to serve less than 30% of four year olds and less than 5% of three year olds.” (Senator Harkin)

• 41 States/Territories offer some form of State Funded PreK; 10 States do not (HI, ID, IN, MI, MT, NH, ND, SD, UT, WY).

• 7 States serve more than 50% of their 4-year-old population in State PreK (IA, FL, GA, OK, TX, VT, WI, WV). (NIEER)

QUALITY

• 38 States have implemented QRIS (Quality Rating and Improvement Systems) statewide (2013).

• In 2013, 45 States had Early Learning Standards or developmental guidelines for Infants & Toddlers.

• In 2013, 12 states required districts to offer full day kindergarten.

• More than half a million children, or 41 % of nationwide enrollment in State Funded PreK, were served in programs that met fewer than half of the quality standards or benchmarks. (NIIER, 2013)

• Across the country, approximately 10% of Centers are Nationally Accredited and 1% of Family Child Care Homes are Nationally Accredited. (Child Care Aware).

Living in Poverty

• In 2012, 40% of U.S. wage earners received less than $20,000 in compensation, before taxes; 53% of U.S. wage earners received less than $30,000. Finally, a cumulative 73% of U.S. wage earners received less than $50,000 in compensation. (SS.gov)

• Between 2000-2010, the number of US children living in poverty increased by 2.5 million+.

• Recent economic studies now indicate that the average US family needs to earn twice the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to “make ends meet.” Families living below this level, are considered “Low-Income.” This terminology is more than a stigma, for policy and program, it is used as definitions for thresholds, guidelines, and eligibility.


• In 2009, “Low-Income” was $44,100 or less for a family of four; in 2014, it is $47,700. Low-Income is the most common definition and requirement for eligibility and access to federal childcare subsidies (this threshold varies by state).
• In 2012, there were 24 million children under the age of six (in the US) living in poverty; 48% were in “low-income” families, 25% were in “poor” families.

• The National Center for Children in Poverty reported that in the US, 2014, nearly 1 in 5 children (16 million) lived in families considered “Poor” and 45% of all U.S. children are in “low-income” families.

• Eight percent (6.2 million) were living in “extreme poverty.” In 2012, nearly half of all US infants and toddlers lived in “low-income” families.

• 35% of White Infants and Toddlers live in “Low-Income” Families compared to 71% of Black, 68% of American Indian, 66% of Hispanics, 47% of those who indicate “other” race, and 28% of Asian Infants and Toddlers (I&T).

• About 1 in 3 Hispanic children represent “poor children” in the national average (that rate varies significantly by state). Of children in immigrant families, 1 in 4 are living in poverty.

• Of families in living in poverty, 21% report food insecurity, half report spending 30% or more of income on rent, and 17% indicate children do not have access to health insurance.

Serving Children in Poverty

• “Head Start is currently serving 45% of eligible children (those living in poverty). Early Head Start is only serving 5% of eligible children (living in poverty). In childcare, there are 4.2 million 0-3 year olds eligible, yet only 700,000 are receiving services.” Senator Harkin

• For a single mother, the cost of infant care averages 26%-65% of her income. (Child Care Aware).

• There are 15.1 million Children, under the age of 6, who potentially need child care in order for parents to work. (Child Care Aware)

• Early Head Start, for infants and toddlers, is not simply about child care. It provides services to pregnant women and families until the child turns 3. Services include home visits, screenings for health/development/behavior, social and emotional health, nutritional support, disability services, and more.