



AMI/USA Administrators Session

3/10/2021

To share strategies, questions, and concerns facing AMI/USA administrators. Initial discussions started in March 2020 surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, school closings and reopening, and remote learning and continue to evolve to support evolving needs of the administrator community.

AGENDA

1. Ayize Sabater, AMI/USA Executive Director, introduction.
2. A panel of Administrators from AMI Montessori Public schools share strategies regarding Montessori in the public-school realm.

Panelists:

- [Alyssa Schwartz](#) - Cornerstone Montessori School Elementary
- [Melissa Droessler](#) - Isthmus Montessori Academy
- [Laura Hertzler](#) - Keystone Montessori School
- [Shannon Lawson](#) - Spokane Public Montessori
- [Sylvie Fitzgerald](#) - Lumin East Dallas Community School
- [Vivian Novo-MacDonald](#) - Annie Fisher Montessori Magnet School

MEETING NOTES

Welcome everyone, we are so glad that you could join us!
<p>Ayize Sabater introduces the session, reference to the new paper published in the Journal of Negro Education about Montessori as culturally responsive pedagogy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lillard, A. S., Taggart, J.*, Yonas, D*., & Seale, M. N. (in press). An alternative to “no excuses”: Considering Montessori as culturally responsive pedagogy. <i>Journal of Negro Education</i>: https://uva.theopenscholar.com/early-development-lab/publications/alternative-no-excuses-considering-montessori-culturally-responsive-pedagogy
Montessori fairs well based on recent research studies, and is making academic gains for BIPOC students. We look forward to hearing more from our panelists about their successes and challenges.

Another related study:

- Lillard, A.S., Heise, M.J., Richey, E.M., Tong, X., Hart, A. & Bray, P.M. **Montessori Preschool Elevates and Equalizes Child Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study.** *Frontiers in Psychology*, October 2017.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01783/full>

Lynne introduces the panelists. Each panelist is invited to share a bit about themselves and their school.

Alyssa Schwartz – Cornerstone Montessori Elementary

Saint Paul, MN - A public charter school serving about 140 children in grades K-6. Enrollment is slightly down due to pandemic. A diverse community, about 50% children of color, about 40% qualify for free or reduced lunch through USDA. Also run a private preschool program through the Montessori Training Center of Minnesota (Cornerstone Montessori School) for toddler and children's house, also a diversity community - about 60% children of color, and 68% qualifying for free or reduced lunch. Funded through public means, but not a public program. Open to questions.

Melissa Droessler - Isthmus Montessori Academy Public

Madison, WI – have just under 300 learners from Nido to 11th grade. Will add 12th grade next year. Public charter for 4K through 11th grade and up. Birth to 3 is a non-profit, state subsidized but not public. Working to convince everyone that all learners start before birth. Families who qualify can come tuition free. For the public portion, the community more than 25% of the population represents the global majority. Title 1 school means 40% of families are at or below the poverty level.

Laura Hertzler - Keystone Montessori School

Phoenix, AZ – just under 300 students, serve children from Toddler through 9th grade. Public charter starts at 1st grade. Toddler and Children's House program is private. Current enrollment slightly down due to pandemic. Community is rallying. Going into their 26th year. Met two weeks before shutdown to discuss strategic planning, so that had to be put on the back burner. Looking forward to renewed plans and looking forward to the future. Reflecting on what conditions COVID has shown a bright light, inequities that were noted.

Shannon Lawson – Spokane Public Montessori

Spokane, WA – Reflecting on the blessings of technology that allows us to come together, embracing all of the positives that we can. Serving about 500 children from K – 8. It is a lottery process, and they are part of the local public-school system. Increased diversity from 15% to 30%. Main driving mission that Montessori is for everybody. Blessed with a talented staff who has risen to the challenges presented.

Sylvie Fitzgerald – Lumin East Dallas Community School

Dallas, TX – Lumin Education has 3 campuses. East Dallas is the original campus created in 1978 in poor neighborhood, so it has always had a diverse population. In 1999, expanded to become a public school by creating a second campus. The school normally serves around 300 students, the pandemic did affect enrollment. Third campus - program is focused on parent education, program starts in pregnancy with parent classes and goes through 3rd grade. Centered in early childhood education. They have parent educators who go to homes, and work with pregnant parents. Program continues to the age of 3 when children enroll in the school. They believe the foundation

makes all the difference. Looking forward to learning from everyone, acknowledging that Montessori in the public realm has unique challenges.

Vivian Novo-MacDonald – Annie Fisher Montessori Magnet School

Hartford, CT - 4th year as principal of the school. There are 3 public Montessori schools in the city. Annie Fisher is a magnet school for Hartford Public Schools, so there are students from 29 different districts. Half are from Hartford, and half are from suburban towns. There are about 360 students right now. Magnet school established in 2008. There are 6 primary, 4 lower el, 3 upper el, and 1 erdkinder classroom (erdkinder is in the 5th year of operation). About 53% of students receive free or reduced lunch. 50% African American, 20% Hispanic. Acknowledges the challenges this year has brought.

Question and Answer

Question – how have public schools gone about launching programs for families with children under 3? How does this work, what are the challenges and benefits?

Sylvie Fitzgerald – Lumin starts with parent education, and toddler programs. The focus is on working with the parents to make sure that they understand they are the first teacher of their own children. There is a dedicated session to empower parents by providing information and giving them tools, regarding brain development, importance of talking to your child and reading with your child. A parent educator is assigned to each family who works with the family in their home. Once the child is walking well, they go into the public program. It is noticeable that the children with the early experience are prepared and ready to choose work, respect other's work, and ready to learn. You can see the difference. Challenges of the toddler program: it is very costly; the materials, staffing, and training are all costly. They are committed to finding qualified guides who truly understand the importance of the absorbent mind. They tried to open another toddler program, but it is cost prohibitive. All programs are free to low-income families.

Alyssa Schwartz – their toddler program and birth to 5 programs are not part of the public school, but they do use public funds. Suggestions for funding to support low-income families. There are federal funds distributed to states called the Child Care and Development block grants. Every state distributes these funds differently. In MN, they have a state level program that follows the child, and also county assistance so families who qualify can go through their county social worker to receive funds to attend. They also have a grant funded: Birth to 5 program through a local community center, free for families to attend with parent education piece, and parent/baby component. In addition to education, provides material distribution, lunch, and information about Montessori. Happy to share more details on this with whoever is interested.

Melissa Droessler – When their school started, the plan was to have only primary and up. Then, it was apparent that there was a strong need for early childhood care, and they sponsored someone for birth-3 training and established the YCC (Toddler program). Then the Nido was developed, same licensing in the state. For parent education, partnering with community centers is a good idea. The licensing is a big hurdle but not as big as preconceived. Don't let this be the obstacle. Melissa will provide any help with this, if needed, to translate the licensing requirements to Montessori (developmentally appropriate environments and encouraging and thriving environments). Have not had to advertise for the nido or toddler programs. Cost is high – always sponsoring trainees as there is often a need for qualified teachers.

Question about the marketing piece – Do you need to advertise and promote your programs, especially the under 3 programs?

Laura Hertzler – The school started in their founder’s home, and then moved to the current location with 5 acres. They previously did not have to advertise, was always word of mouth. There are now more child-care centers in the area. They are making efforts to be more visible in the community. They created videos (like Aid-to-life videos) about the children which are free and open to the public. They have a parent/child class where guide takes a field trip, includes the parents and guardians in the environment (4-week program, for 1 hour). Parent/child class helps with enrollment for the upper programs. Currently using Nido Marketing for social media and marketing and having a very positive experience. Participate in Community Centers and events– help to create a presence, to show who you are and get visibility in the community.

Question – this is an independent school started in 2013, Charlotte, NC, that is at capacity, and looking at next steps such as satellite school, or opening a toddler class. An AMI Training Center in the state would be helpful. Trying to see how they can raise the level of instruction in the local public schools, and how their school can assist. Do any of the panelists feel that being close to an AMI Training Center is helpful to their success?

Shannon Lawson – their program is 35 years old, AMI Training is foundational. There were many staff members needing to be trained, but no training center or any opportunities to bring in new AMI trained staff. So, Shannon partnered with the local university to establish an AMI Training Center ([Whitworth University - Montessori Northwest](#)) and coupled it with the Master in Education program. It has been phenomenal, has hired 11 teachers from the training center over the past 3 years. This partnership has been critical in providing qualified teachers.

Laura Hertzler – their founder also started [Southwest Institute of Montessori Studies](#) which has toddler, primary and elementary training. SIMS also has a lab school. It is a blessing, and having the training center in the local area is a great partnership.

Shannon Lawson – since the training was becoming cost prohibitive both in time and resources, Shannon worked with Teachers union to have the training paid for by the district. This provided more access to trained teachers and increased equity in gaining the right group of educators.

Sylvie Fitzgerald – partnership with [Montessori Institute of North Texas](#) is valuable, critical. Can’t imagine not having them. A resource for training and professional development, recruitment. Partnership and support. Large population of English as a second language. The training center is a great resource for the teacher’s work. Had challenges for teachers to incorporate the state standards into their lessons. MINT partnered with them and created an alignment document. MINT also trained teachers on how to use it and continue to be a vital resource.

Alyssa Schwartz – aligned with the [Montessori Training Center of Minnesota](#), just as critical as having the AMI Training Center to develop relationship with a university so that the teachers can get licensure through an accredited program. It is so important for their teachers to have easy access to the education that they need for the state to sponsor them. If you are looking at doing a feasibility study for a training center, think about which universities might be willing to partner.

Vivian Novo-Macdonald – the school partners with [Montessori Training Center Northeast](#) – partner with the University of Hartford. The training center does an orientation course with the

<p>classroom assistants, sponsored by the school. Having student teachers who are taking the courses also helps to keep the teacher's skills strong.</p>
<p><u>Question from a public school in CO, about ratio. How have you found working with the state Montessori association around public initiatives, mainly related to rations. They have to maintain a state-required ratio of 1:10. What are others finding working on this issue?</u></p>
<p>Alyssa Schwartz – it is important that the state Montessori association is working as a cohesive voice to advocate for requirements and licensing that relate to Montessori schools. Montessori Public Policy Initiative is crucial in coordinating state-level Montessori issues. In MN, there is a similar requirement for a 1:10 ratio. They do have 30 children and 3 adults in each class and they have to make sure that all classroom assistants are trained well, and they know the appropriate practices.</p>
<p>Melissa Droessler – emphasize working as a collective with the state Montessori association. Make sure that all of the educators are trained by a Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education approved training center. They worked hard to create a pathway for a state teaching license in the state for all AMI diploma holders. For the YCC, the required ratio is 1:4, which prohibits growth to 10 children in the class and is part of the financial burden. Melissa and Carrie were also involved in the training of the ‘Licensing Raters’. This information was needed to ensure that the Montessori practices were explained clearly. Happy to share!</p>
<p><u>Question – what adaptations have been made for primary and elementary classes due to pandemic conditions, and how are schools now being able to ease up on the restrictions?</u></p>
<p>Hawley Hoggard - Once the staff is all vaccinated, they will not have to wear masks, and they will bring singing back indoors. Some changes will remain, such as emphasis on hand-washing and not having parents in the building. The school also opened early in August, in case a closure was needed.</p>
<p>Vivian Novo-Macdonald – there are half of their students learning online right now. Students were able to choose in-person or online learning. They are moving toward getting all the students back in person soon. The staff will be fully vaccinated soon. There are still families that are opting not to return in-person. Started out having each child at their own desk, 6 feet apart with social distancing and cleaning materials in between use. This is becoming more challenging as more students return to the school.</p>
<p><u>What are people doing to manage the extra stress of administration this year?</u></p>
<p>Laura Hertzler – was fortunate to be enrolled in Whole School Leadership, which started just as everything shut down. This was very supportive and very therapeutic. Suggestion that finding someone outside of your organization, that is going to understand and allow for sharing in a safe space. Administrators need to be comfortable, not to add to the teacher's burden. Also seeking therapy to have someone to discuss issues with outside your organization, as an objective support. Make an appointment with yourself for your well-being, whether your therapy is yoga, or other.</p>
<p>Melissa Droessler – find someone who can support you. Has support from Montessori Public in Action. Also, they keep board games at the school, play games, stop and laugh. Sometimes she wears her sparkle jacket, and they play a lot of music. She acknowledges that children are always watching us. We can reach out to each other, and let the children see us working hard.</p>

Shannon Lawson - shared "[Onward: Cultivating Emotional Resilience in Educators](#)" EPUb by [Elena Aguilar](#)".

We would love to include your **school news** in the upcoming Spring Journal. Submissions of 500 words or less and photos are requested to [Sarah Kozicki](#) by April 15.

Also, please plan to join us for the **APRIL Administrators session on Environmental Education and Montessori** on April 7, 2021: 10 am PT / 11 am MT / 12 pm CT / 1 pm ET

Thank you to all who were able to attend and your continued support! Please feel free to share topics and suggestions for future meetings and requests for support needed.

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