



ST. FRANCIS MONTESSORI

MONTESSORI EDUCATION FOR AGES THREE TO TWELVE

Saint Francis Montessori Frequently Asked Questions

What is Montessori education?

See this link for an excellent FAQ about Montessori education in general, thoroughly addressing all its characteristics:
<http://www.montessori.edu/FAQ.html#QUESTIONS>

Who started the Montessori method?

The Montessori method was developed by Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the first woman in Italy to receive a medical degree. She also did extensive work in the fields of psychiatry, anthropology, and education. Dr. Montessori observed and worked with young children in an economically deprived area in Rome. These children aged 3 - 6 had been left unattended by their working families and had vandalized the tenement buildings. With understanding and wisdom, Montessori began to create and provide concrete materials that called forth deep concentration from the children. Within a year, the children made public news; the multitudes could not believe the newly revealed characteristics of these children. Montessori continued her observation with other groups of children with the same results—the children engaged in purposeful work that left their bodies, minds, and spirits richer and deeply satisfied. Her new vocation was before her and she wrote and taught those interested in learning about the hidden characteristics of childhood.

Why are there mixed ages in the classroom?

Dr. Maria Montessori observed that children ages 3-6 are in a complimentary stage of development, as well as children 6-12 years old. Saint Francis has 2 Primary classrooms and 1 Elementary classroom. Children of the primary age group learn concretely, primarily through the use of their hands, and have what Montessori calls an absorbent mind; children of the Elementary age group have a reasoning mind and are intellectual explorers. At each stage of development, children are in similar sensitive periods for learning and absorbing information from their environment. Moreover, the mixed age groups allow for a natural society to flourish, the young bringing natural wonder to the older children, the older children assisting the younger children, leading to harmonious collaboration.

What is in a Montessori classroom?

The Primary classroom has 5 areas of learning each with specific materials: practical life, sensorial, language, mathematics, and culture (including geography, nature studies/science, and history). The Elementary classroom extends into the greater breadth of learning within each subject.

Practical Life

The practical life materials invite the child to greater independence as s/he masters the practical skills around him/her. They not only provide the purposeful work that appeals to the young child, but they orient the child to his new environment, inviting the child to complete a full cycle of activity while participating in the care of the environment and the care of oneself. Examples of the practical life materials include self-contained activities, such as dressing frames, pouring water activities, spooning activities, dusting, polishing, plant washing, table washing, linen washing, dish washing, food preparation, sweeping, mopping, window washing, and table setting.

Sensorial

The sensorial material allows the child to explore the qualities and characteristics of carefully prepared materials in the environment in a specific and isolated manner through the use of the child's senses. The sensorial materials include self-contained activities, such as, the pink tower, the brown stairs, the red rods, the mystery bag, smelling bottles, the rough and smooth tablets, the geometric solids, the cylinder blocks, the knob less cylinder blocks, sorting trays, sound cylinders, binomial cube, trinomial cube, color boxes, fabric sorting, triangle boxes, the geometric cabinet, and the bells.

Language

The language material offers the child the participation in his/her language's heritage. The child is invited to hear stories and poetry as well as learn to read and write. The older children begin their work in grammar, as they are in a sensitive period for learning the function of words as well. The language materials include self-contained activities, such as, books, poetry booklets, story cards, picture cards, classification cards, bookmaking, sandpaper letters, moveable alphabet, phonetic object boxes and cards with labels, phonogram work, sight words, easy readers, science and art books, grammar activities, dictation, chalkboards, metal insets with colored pencils, and writing paper with lead pencils.

Math

The math material invites children to explore the different relationships of mathematics in a sensorially-based approach as the child first learns to identify numbers and, with many steps in between, eventually can do complicated works of the four operations and fractions. The math materials include self-contained activities, such as, the number rods, the spindle box, cards and counters, the number game, introduction to the decimal system through units, tens, hundreds, thousands, the four operations, numbers 11-19, numbers 11-99, skip counting on the chains, the stamp game, grid paper and pencils, the dot board with markers, the snake game, addition and subtraction boards, addition and subtraction finger charts, multiplication beads and boards, multiplication finger charts, and word problems.

The Cultural Area

The child is introduced to art, music, science, geography, time, and history in the cultural material. The cultural materials include self-contained activities, such as, art history cards, art materials, such as scissors, crayons, colored pencils, coloring pages, white and colored paper for free art, gluing, water paints, stamping, also color mixing, clay molding, pencil sharpening, chalk, using a ruler; music materials, such as a CD of famous composers and a radio, clapping charts, songs; science experiments led by the adult, as well as parts of animals, parts of flowers; geography maps, cultural picture cards, land and water forms, globes; calendar work; and picture cards designating time.

The Elementary Casas have each of these subjects represented, plus many sub-categories per academic subject. A full curriculum overview is available upon request.

Activities Appropriate for Each Age Group

Children of ages 3 to 6 work together in the same environment; children ages 6-12 work in the same environment. Some activities appeal to all of the different age groups, while other activities only appeal only to the select age group. The language and math material progress according to the child's ability, therefore, for example, the word problems and fractions work is not age-appropriate for a 3 or 4 year old, but very appropriate to 5 and older. Children of older ages have the freedom to do work presented when they were younger but are guided to complete scholastic work daily.

A general breakdown of the materials that meet the needs of the different age groups are as follows: 3 to 4 yr olds are invited to independence, development of physical skills, complete an activity and participate in the order of the class, care for self and the environment, sensorial exploration, sound awareness, sound identification, classification cards, books, poetry, songs, oral math and language games, art, overall love of learning and joy. The practical life, sensorial, art, puzzle maps, early language and math work are the foundation for the child's first year in a Montessori environment.

4-5 year olds are building on the above experience, ready to refine their skills in practical life, sensorial, and the cultural areas. For language, they also begin to read short phonetic words at first, followed by phonograms and sight words, single words progressing into phrases then sentences, simple books, development of handwriting, and understanding the function of words to learn grammar. For math, they begin with number quantity and numeral identification 1-10, sensorial experience of the decimal system, numbers 11-99, introduction to all four operations through sensorial exploration, skip counting numbers to 1000.

5-6 year olds also are building on their previous experience in the classroom, gaining mastery and confidence in the practical life, sensorial, and cultural areas. For language, they are reading and writing, and furthering the grammar work through sentence analysis. For math, the children begin to memorize mathematical facts of the four operations. Multiple tools, such as an abacus- like instrument, guide the children in their passage to abstraction. Fraction work is also introduced.

In addition to the material above, we have activities that help with control of movement, such as “walking on the line” and “the silence game.”

If my child is left to choose his/her own projects, won't he/she do the same thing day in and day out, or do nothing at all?

The child is guided by the trained adult and assistant in his/her daily work. The teacher knows and respects the pace of the child, while at the same time, challenges the child to explore new areas of learning. The trained adult also realizes the importance of repetition if it is fulfilling the needs of a sensitive period. Moreover, the trained adult understands the power of the absorbent mind and knows that when a child is watching other children engaged in work, that s/he too is engaged. The Montessori environment invites a child to participation based on this understanding of the absorbent mind and the child's free choice. When a child is ready to engage, s/he does so whole-heartedly.

I've heard Montessori is too individualized and does not allow socialization. Is this true?

In fact, a more natural socialization occurs among the children. Children naturally collaborate in small groups when they are developmentally ready. Children can either work individually, as we all have a need to do at times, or work with others, not concerned with competition as much as with constructive collaboration.

What are the benefits of Montessori education?

The benefits of a Montessori education are manifold. First and foremost, Montessorians understand the child's development and serves those needs in the present. It cannot be underestimated the respect Montessori taught her students to have for the child. Also, the firm foundation of academic learning in the concrete and through the detailed process of understanding math and language through Montessori's systematic approach, the child usually achieves a deeper level of understanding him/herself. Further benefits are independence, self-confidence, and a love of learning.

What is Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and who is qualified to teach it?

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a religious formation for children ages 3-12 based on the principles of Dr. Maria Montessori, Sofia Cavalletti, and Gianna Gobbi. It is an integral part of the child's self-formation offered at St. Francis Montessori. Perceiving the inherent religious potential of the child, Cavalletti and Gobbi furthered the initial work of Montessori developing this catechesis for the child's religious experience, based on Catholic Scripture and Liturgy and with an understanding of the Jewish scriptures and tradition. One hallmark of the Catechesis is its recognition that children have a unique spirituality and approach to God, very different from that of adults, but equally real and deep. Those who have completed the coursework for the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd are qualified to teach in the Atrium, the specially prepared environment of this formation. For more information, the official website of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is <http://www.cgsusa.org/>.

How difficult is integration into a traditional school after the Montessori classroom experience?

Every child is different depending on his/her needs, but in general, there is a period of adjustment, as the child must learn a new way of instruction. Once this adjustment is over, typically the young child does very well, because s/he loves to learn and is engaged in the subject matter, along with independent learning and self-control. It is very important that both the teachers and parents prepare the child for the transition for a new learning environment.

What are the hours and schedule of the SFM day?

Schedule of a Typical Day in Primary

8:00 - 8:15	Drop-off and Greetings as children arrive
8:15 - 11:15	Montessori Work Period
11:15 - 11:30	Group time and Daily Prayer
11:30 - 12:00	Recess and Dismissal for Morning Children
12:00 - 1:00	Lunch and Group Reading for the Afternoon Children
1:00 – 3:15	Montessori Work Period
3:15	Dismissal for the Afternoon Children

What is the child/adult ratio?

St. Francis Montessori maintains child-to-teacher ratios ordered by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) of Texas and based on Association Montessori Internationale standards. The ratio depends on the ages of the children, allowing for 30 to 35 children in the primary classroom with two adults, 1 of whom is Montessori trained. The Elementary is divided into Lower Elementary and Upper Elementary ranging from 24 to 35 children. According to Montessori standards, a large student to adult ratio is considered optimal, since it allows the children to develop their independence.

How is a Montessori teacher trained?

A person interested in becoming a Montessori guide must decide which training program to attend. Two main organizations, among other smaller organizations, offer this training: Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the American Montessori Society (AMS). AMI was founded by Dr. Montessori and remains an international organization. AMS is the American organization and includes other pedagogies in addition to Montessori. Each training program in different degrees requires attendance at lectures, completion of teacher manuals, observation and student teaching, and written and oral exams. Ideally, the training program not only teaches about the child, how s/he learns, and about his/her inherent dignity, but also invites the adult to understand the child at the deepest level that Montessori herself revealed.

Is parent involvement encouraged at Saint Francis?

Parent involvement is strongly encouraged. St. Francis Montessori not only has many growing needs, but also strives for a spirit of family togetherness. Parents are invited to observe their children throughout the year, help make materials, participate in social gatherings, and provide feedback to SFM.

Where is Saint Francis located?

Saint Francis has 3 locations: The Primary building for ages 3-6 is at 545 Iris Drive, Irving 75061. This building is one block east of the crossroads MacArthur and Pioneer. Saint Clare's is located at 533 Iris, two doors south, for the Upper Elementary children, ages 9-12. Around the residential corner is San Damiano, where the Lower Elementary children, ages 6-9, work in their casas.

What precautions are taken for the safety of the children?

Safety precautions are in adherence to AMITOT and the state of TX's DFPS' standards and regulations, which can be accessed by parents in the DFPS Minimum Standards, located at SFM as well as at the DFPS website. Careful observation and understanding of danger, teacher in-services, and care of the environment also serve to provide for a safe environment.

Is financial aid available?

Yes, need based financial aid is available in the form of jobs for tuition exchange. A financial aid application is available with the application and should be submitted with your new child application form.

Do children have to be potty-trained to attend?

Children need to be potty-trained to attend and must be three.

What are the requirements for entrance?

During the admission process, you will be asked to submit the following: an application form, an enrollment form, an up-to-date immunization record or a notarized affidavit from the Department of Health exempting you from immunizations, a record of a doctor examination within the past year, and for ages 4 and up, records of vision and hearing tests.

What is tuition?

Please see the application or the website at <http://www.stfrancisirving.org/tuition.html>

Is there a sibling discount?

Yes, please see the application or the website at <http://www.stfrancisirving.org/tuition.html>

What costs are there other than tuition?

There is a \$25 application fee and a \$250 materials/registration fee. There is also a school supplies fee and parents will purchase one week of snacks for the classroom once per year. We ask for volunteer help (20 hours per year) from the parents; if the parents are not able to volunteer with their time, we ask for a monetary substitute. We also ask each family to raise \$500 annually or provide a monetary substitute. Elementary families have an activities fee of \$100 and a language fee of \$100.