

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the key ways that Montessori differs from a traditional curriculum?

Montessori offers a unique approach to education, emphasizing active learning through all five senses, not only through listening, watching, or reading. Children in Montessori classes direct their own learning in an intentionally designed environment under the guidance of a trained and certified teacher. Your child will learn at their own, individual pace and according to their choice and curiosity. Learning is an exciting and engaging process of discovery, leading to concentration, motivation, self-discipline, and a love of learning. Montessori classes place children in multi-year age groups (18-months to 3-years and 3- to 6-years) forming communities in which the older children spontaneously share their knowledge with the younger ones. For the teacher, knowing every child as an individual is a core value. Parents learn more about this and see the power of the self-directed learning environment during Open Houses, the Parent Tour and the Parent-Child Visit.

What opportunities do children have for large motor activities at Greene Towne?

Movement and physical activity are important to both cognitive and physical development in children. Greene Towne students have daily free play on the rooftop playdeck. All students have a weekly movement class and Primary students have an option to take after school martial arts and movement/yoga class. During your Parent Tour, you'll also notice that within the classroom environment, children have free range of movement as they work and navigate the classroom.

Why do Greene Towne Montessori teachers encourage my young child to be independent?

Supporting your child's natural drive towards and development of independence and self-sufficiency is a hallmark of Greene Towne's program. Children who are independent and make self-directed choices develop self-confidence and experience pride as they accomplish their goals.

In the Montessori classroom, young children are supported to become autonomous in caring for their personal needs and in taking care of their classroom environment. Children are given freedom of movement and choice over their activities in the classroom and are encouraged and supported to "do it for themselves."

Greene Towne students are self-confident learners who believe in their own abilities to accomplish a task. This confidence and self-reliance sets the stage for all future learning.

Why do the youngest Montessori children sometimes come home with shoes on the opposite feet?

This is a common question in any Montessori toddler or preschool classroom. It often comes at pick up time, when families express concern that their child's teachers may have incorrectly put on their child's shoes out of a lack of concern or care. In fact, this couldn't be further from the truth.

The foundation of Montessori education is based upon one simple call that the child sends to the adult world: "Help me to do it myself." In the early years of development, children demonstrate an amazing propensity to "do it myself." Just as an infant must take their first wobbly steps for themselves – their first steps towards independence – the toddler is presented with the challenges of toilet training, learning to dress and undress, to prepare food, eat in a community, and take turns.

Through repetition and practice, the toddler develops these practical life skills. While these undertakings may seem “cute” to onlookers, it is also a profoundly moving stage in the child’s development, where they master the skills of independence, self-care, and awareness of others.

Learning to put shoes on the correct feet is an important part of learning to be independent and self-sufficient. This is a huge task for a two- to six-year-old child, who may take weeks, if not months, to master the concept. The ultimate achievement of this task may be accompanied by tears, giving up, tantrums, trying again, perseverance, and eventually success. However, these stages of problem-solving often happen unobserved.

For this reason, it is easy for adults to simply see that the “shoe is on the wrong foot,” as opposed to the immense learning process that went into the outcome. This is often why parents step in to “correct” the mistake, and put their child’s shoes on for them. In effect, deflating their child’s new-found sense of accomplishment.

By taking away a child’s ability to “help me to do it myself,” parents fail to acknowledge their budding self-care and problem-solving skills. While this is a simple example, it establishes a pattern, where parents take on responsibilities for their child. Other examples might be when parents clean up after their children when they are capable, complete their child’s homework instead of helping, or finish their child’s sentences instead of waiting for them to get the words out.

By overly-anticipating children’s needs, adults are not serving them. In fact, we are hindering their development. As Maria Montessori observed: “Needless help is an actual hindrance to the development of natural force.”

To support and protect children’s independence and self-agency, we must create an environment that is focused on the learning process, not the outcome. We do not “correct” children’s mistakes by doing things for them. Instead, we encourage them to make mistakes, and learn from them.

By empowering children with the appropriate support tools, time, and patience, we encourage them to become capable learners and problem solvers. By allowing children to “help me to do it myself,” we are fully supporting their education, not only with our words, but with our actions. This is what it truly means to talk the Montessori talk, and walk the Montessori walk.

Can Montessori accommodate gifted children? What about children with other special learning needs?

An advantage of the Montessori approach—including multi-age classrooms with students of varying abilities and interests—is that it allows each child to work at his or her own pace with no limits to learning. Students whose strengths and interests propel them to higher levels of learning can find intellectual challenge without being separated from their peers. The same is true for students who may need extra guidance and support, each can progress through the curriculum at their own comfortable pace, without feeling pressure to “catch up.”

From a Montessori perspective, every child is considered gifted, each in his own way. Every child has unique strengths and interests that the Montessori environment nurtures and supports.

Do Greene Towne Montessori teachers follow a curriculum?

All Greene Towne lead teachers are certified Montessori teachers who have completed a rigorous training in the specific Montessori methodology and child development, resulting in a consistency across every level in the program.

Montessori schools teach the same basic skills as traditional schools, and offer a rigorous academic program. Most of the subject areas are familiar—such as math, science, history, geography, and language—but they are presented through an integrated approach that weaves separate strands of the curriculum together.

While studying a map of Africa, for example, students may explore the natural history, art, history, and inventions of several African nations. This may lead them to examine ancient Egypt, including hieroglyphs and their place in the history of writing. And the study of the pyramids is a natural bridge to geometry! This approach to curriculum demonstrates the interrelatedness of all things. It also allows students to become thoroughly immersed in a topic—and to give their curiosity full rein.

Is it true that Montessori students are free to do whatever they want, and at their own pace?

Dr. Maria Montessori observed that children are more motivated to learn when working on something of their own choosing, and at their own unique pace. A Montessori student may choose their focus of learning on any given day, but decisions are limited by the materials and activities—in each area of the curriculum—that the teacher has prepared and presented to the student.

Beginning at the Kindergarten level, students typically set learning goals and create personal work plans under their teacher's guidance.

If children work at their own pace, don't they fall behind?

Although students are free to work at their own pace, they're not going it alone. The Montessori teacher closely observes each child and provides materials and activities that advance their learning by building on skills and knowledge already gained. This gentle guidance helps each child master the challenge at hand—and protects them from moving on before they are ready, which is often what causes children to “fall behind.” Each child is challenged appropriately in each area of the curriculum to ensure that skills and competencies are fully developed and that the child is able to pursue his own unique interests.

Why are Montessori schools all work and no play?

This is a common misunderstanding of Montessori education. Dr. Montessori realized that children's play *is* their work—their effort to master their own bodies and environment—and out of respect she used the term “work” to describe all their classroom activities. Greene Towne Montessori students work hard, but they don't experience it as drudgery; rather, it's an expression of their natural curiosity and desire to learn. They engage in these activities with joy and focus—intent on mastering new skills independently!

I've heard that Montessori teachers don't really teach. Is this true? If so, what do they do?

When you observe a Montessori teacher at work you may be surprised! You will not see the teacher standing in front of the classroom offering the same lesson to the entire class, because the Montessori curriculum is individualized to the needs, interests, and learning style of each child. Often you will find the teacher on the floor, working with an individual child. With older children, the teacher may be giving a small group lesson, or demonstrating a lesson or activity that the students will then complete on their own.

One of the many roles of the Montessori teacher is to observe each child and the classroom community as a whole and make adaptations to the environment and lesson-planning as needed to support each child's development. As the Montessori teacher observes, they are determining when and how to introduce a new challenging lesson to a student, and when to review a previous lesson if a skill has not yet been mastered.

While a Montessori student may choose their activities on any given day, their decisions are limited by the materials and activities in each area of the curriculum that the teacher has prepared and presented to them. The teacher's observations inform each child's personalized learning plan and allow each child to move through the curriculum at an appropriate pace and level of challenge.

Where do Greene Towne Kindergartners go for 1st grade?

Greene Towners complete their Kindergarten year profoundly prepared for 1st grade and beyond. In addition to their intellectual preparation—with strong foundations in literacy and numeracy—they are adept in relational competence, demonstrating the myriad leadership and interpersonal skills to function successfully in the complex world that awaits them. They are respectful, creative, curious, confident, competent, independent, determined and thoughtful of those around them.

The Greene Towne team, from the Head of School to your child's teacher, supports the family throughout the Applying to 1st grade process. Starting with a parent evening when representatives from area schools introduce families to the process, we guide parents through the process that ends with your child's enrollment in 1st grade at one of 20 area schools our students typically attend for 1st grade. When Greene Towners transition out of a Montessori environment to conventional learning settings, they thrive both socially and academically. Poised, self-reliant, and used to working harmoniously as part of a classroom community, students who move from Montessori typically adjust quickly to the ways of their new school. In Philadelphia, Greene Towners are valued additions to all of the schools they transition to for first grade.

How will my child adjust to being in a traditional elementary school after attending a Montessori school?

Throughout their time in Primary, and of particular focus in the Kindergarten year, Greene Towne students hone their organizational and group learning skills. When Greene Towners transition out of a Montessori environment to conventional learning settings, they thrive both socially and academically. Poised, self-reliant, and used to working harmoniously as part of a classroom community, students who move from Montessori adjust quickly to the ways of their new school. In Philadelphia, Greene Towners are valued additions to all of the schools they transition to for first grade.

How well do Montessori students do compared to students in non-Montessori schools?

A growing body of research comparing Montessori students to those in traditional schools suggests that in academic subjects, Montessori students perform as well as or better—academically and socially—than their non-Montessori peers. These benefits grow as children have more experience in a Montessori environment.

Greene Towne alums are typically accepted into the primary and secondary schools, and colleges of their choice. And many [successful graduates](#) cite their years at Montessori when reflecting on the important influences in their life.

Our FAQs are adapted from The American Montessori Society, Greene Towne's accrediting organization.