



Montessori School Overview Report

School: George Washington Elementary School, Kingston, NY				Visit Date: May 18, 2023
Head of School: Wanda Lobianco				Enrollment: 332
Montessori Classrooms	CH: 6	EI: 7	EII: 3	Total: 16

Introduction:

The George Washington Elementary School is a public Montessori school that is part of the Kingston School District in Kingston, NY offering Montessori classrooms for 3-10 year olds. Three and four year olds enter on separate lotteries requiring families apply multiple times prior to being a permanent part of the community.

The current enrollment is 332 students; 45% Hispanic, 32% White, 11% Black or African American, 9% Multiracial and 3% Asian or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander. 66% of the students are from economically disadvantaged families, 29% are English Language Learners and 23% are recognized as students with disabilities.

Last year’s assessment results show students at the end of Elementary I scoring with 32% proficient in ELA and 26% proficient in Math. The Elementary II students scored 45% proficient in ELA and 13% proficient in Math.

Their school climate shows an 87% attendance rate and a 0% suspension rate.

Tools:

Several tools were used to review the school’s current practices.

- 1. Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public School Sector.** This is widely used to assess the fidelity of Public Montessori programs. The document was collaboratively drafted and endorsed in the late 1990s by The American Montessori Society, the Association Montessori Internationale, the North American Montessori Teachers’ Association, Montessori Educational Programs International, and the Southwestern Montessori Training Center. A more recent version, created by the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector in 2014, was completed by the Principal as a self-study.
- 2. School Overview Observation** tool was used to do an evaluation of student engagement and to review Montessori materials in use. Section one is a count of where students are placing their focus. It is tallied twice in each classroom visit- at the start of the observation and at the close. The next section indicates materials in use during the observation and gives a picture of what Montessori materials were being used at each level on a particular day. This information allows for analysis of both the quantity and diversity of materials observed in use during the visit.
- 3. School Overview Stakeholders Reflection tool** was used in open discussions with various groups: Children’s House, Lower Elementary, 4th grade, special area teachers, support teachers, and families. The

questions asked to promote conversation were “What’s working? What needs work? What ideas do you have?” People had the opportunity to think and talk about the school's strengths and challenges and thus appreciate where it is now. Then they offered suggestions of would need to happen to move the school to an even higher level of excellence.

4. **Surveys:** Both a Staff Survey and a Family Survey were sent to the community. The Staff Survey questions were posed in order to better understand both the current school practices as well as the thoughts and beliefs of the teachers. The Family Survey was included to allow all families to share what they appreciate about the school and to offer suggestions.

Results:

1. Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public School Sector

The table below highlights six important areas of a public Montessori school. Each area shows components that contribute to strength in that area and checks are placed for those evident at George Washington Elementary. Any components that are not checked offer a short explanation in the notes section.

Area	Component	✓	Notes
Montessori Teachers	Employ Montessori teachers who have Montessori credentials for the levels they teach.		8 teachers out of 20 are credentialed at the level they teach. This leaves 60% of classrooms with teachers not holding the Montessori teaching credential at that level.
	Maintain an active and open recruitment for Montessori credentialed teachers.	✓	
	Budget for future Montessori teacher education for non-Montessori credentialed teachers.	✓	
	Provide professional Montessori in-service by experienced credentialed Montessori educators.		All the PD experiences offered this year were district trainings with no unique sessions for Montessori teachers.
	Contract for on-going internal and periodic external Montessori consultation and/or professional support as a follow up to Montessori teacher education.		GW has not recently engaged in any previous outside consultation.
	Employ one paraprofessional per classroom, each having received Montessori orientation for that role.		Many of the classrooms have teaching assistants- not all received Montessori orientation for their role.

Administration	Employ an experienced Montessori teacher to serve as curriculum coordinator/coach.		There is currently a part-time coach supporting some classrooms.
	Employ a building principal/educational leader who has knowledge of Montessori principles and curriculum through Montessori coursework, Montessori Administrator Credential and/or annual conference exposure.	✓	
	Maintain commitment to the core Montessori curriculum and instruction even with changes in administrative staff.		The core Montessori curriculum and instruction is evident in some classrooms at both levels with evidence of district curriculum and instruction as the primary method in others
	Sustain the support of the central administration through high profile communications about program development.	✓	
	Recognize that the best implementation process is to begin with the 2.5 - 6 age group and add one age at a time for a gradual progression.	✓	
Recruitment/ Family Education	Provide Montessori family education programs that promote understanding of Montessori principles and curriculum.		Of the 11 programs (see list in Appendix) none of them focus on promoting understanding of Montessori principles or curriculum
	Develop an admission process that informs parents about the nature of Montessori and seeks the necessary commitment to the program		This would be helpful for families of 3 & 4 year olds to understand the importance of the three year cycle in a Montessori classroom, therefore leading to less student attrition
Curriculum/ Environment	Offer a full complement of Montessori materials purchased from Montessori dealers.		Classrooms appear unevenly resourced across all levels with some rooms having many Montessori materials and others having none.
	Develop a classroom design that is compatible with Montessori "prepared environment" principles		Classrooms ranged in this area with some set up with a maze of shelves and others with too open a design. Few classrooms held a design compatible with the method
	Create uninterrupted daily work periods of 90 minutes to 3-hours, considering the 3-hour work cycle as ideal.		Across the 16 classrooms, schedules reflect a range of time for Montessori work cycle from 0 minutes to 110 minutes. Most schedules

			show a highly structured day with little time for uninterrupted learning. The average across 16 classrooms is a 37 minute work cycle.
	Integrate specialty programs (music, art, physical education, etc.) around the uninterrupted work periods.		Specialty programs happen throughout the work period dividing the day into smaller sections.
	Apply the appropriate multi-age groupings: 2.5-6, 6-9, 9-12, 12-15, 15-18 necessary for the diversity, flexibility, and reduced competition integral to Montessori.		Right now the biggest challenge for GW is the 1 year programs for 3 & 4 year olds. This means though there is multi-age grouping in Children’s House, the children do not all receive 3 years of Montessori education. In addition, all EII classrooms have a stand-alone 4th grade.
Assessment	Use a process of reporting student progress that is compatible with Montessori and includes family conferences and authentic assessment tools such as observation, portfolio, performance assessment with rubric, etc.		The current district reporting system is used with no additional Montessori assessment tools currently in use and Montessori assessment tools are not yet in use
	Implement state mandated assessments in such a way that the character of the Montessori program is not compromised.		The school utilizes standard district assessment practices.
Professional Development	Budget for continuing education through Montessori workshops and conferences.	✓	
	Maintain membership with one or more of the professional Montessori organizations and seek Montessori accreditation to assure consistent quality.		George Washington Elementary is not currently affiliated with any Montessori organizations.

Area	Montessori Teachers	Administration	Recruitment/ Family Education	Curriculum/ Environment	Assessment	Professional Development	TOTAL
Score	2/6	3/5	0/2	0/5	0/2	1/2	6/22 = 27%

Summary

The review of the Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public School Sector is summarized in the table above showing that George Washington Elementary is 27% of the way to being fully implemented.

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The area of greatest need is Curriculum and Environment with none of the five components fully in place yet. This is related to the Montessori Teacher section and the low number of Montessori trained teachers working in classrooms at the level they are credentialed.

The Principal completed the NCMPS Essential Elements Rubric and her results indicate a 32% implementation. This document can be found in the Appendix for further review.

2. School Overview Observation

The team used the School Overview Observation tool to note student engagement and the use of Montessori materials in generating that engagement.

Engagement and Materials:

Whole School Averages					
	Children's House	Elementary 1 - did not include rm. 211/112	Elementary 2 (4th grade) Field Trip	Classroom Average	National Average
Student Engagement	73%	74%	No data	73%	77%
Montessori materials in use:	6	3	No data	5	12/8

These numbers represent an average across the classrooms at each level, looking at student engagement (how many children are engaged in learning) and use of Montessori materials (how many Montessori materials are in use for learning) in classroom observations. These are combined to generate the school-wide average of 73% engaged. The final column is the national average, comprised of 11 public Montessori programs across the country, showing an average of 77% of students engaged with an average of 12 materials in Children's House and an average of 8 Montessori materials in Elementary I.

George Washington Elementary is only slightly behind the national average for engagement, signaling that most children were involved in learning tasks at the time of the observation. The Montessori material usage was significantly lower than the national average at each level with Children's House having an average of 6 as compared to 12 nationally and Elementary 1 with an average of 3 as compared to 8 nationally. This indicates that the students are engaged in learning activities other than Montessori across all levels.

Diversity of Montessori Materials observed in use:

	Math/Geometry	Language	Sensorial/Cultural	Practical Life
Children's House	Wooden number cards Mini number rods Strip board Bead chain 100 Board Snake game	Metal inset Movable alphabet Word cards	Sound cylinders Knobless cylinders Pink tower Constructive triangles	Screw frame bolt frame Spoonng Straining Pin punching Tongs

	Bead bars			Pouring Scooping Sorting
Elem. 1	Stamp game Trinomial cube Bead bars Geometric solids Geometry cabinet Small bead frame	Movable Alphabet Waseca material Spelling cards	Puzzle map	

Rather than the total number of materials in use, the chart above shows the *variety* of materials in use across each level. Children’s House classrooms had the greatest variety in the area of practical life and the least variety in language.

Elementary I had the greatest variety of materials in math and the least variety in the cultural area (which includes geography, history, biology and science), with only one material in use outside of math and language.

Also notable was the sparse number and diversity of Montessori language materials with only 3 types of materials in use at each level.

This reflects the need for more training and professional development in the use of diverse Montessori materials.

3. School Overview Stakeholders Meetings

The Principal was gracious in organizing 20 minute focus groups with school staff and families. The same three questions were posed to all groups. The idea was not to agree, but instead to hear various perspectives in a respectful conversation. As a result, many voices were heard and what is noted here are the themes that arose across the groups.

What’s working?

- Happy learners- Across all groups was the awareness that the children are happy and come to school ready to be there every day. This is also reflected in the high attendance numbers and comments in both the individual staff and family surveys.
- Team collaboration- With the exception of the Specialists (Art, Music and PE), all the teams named their work together as a level team as something that is working well, that they enjoy and rely on.
- Dedicated teaching staff- Teachers are committed to the children at the school. This sentiment was repeated across all the groups

What needs work?

- School climate- This was mentioned from various angles with groups openly naming trust as something lacking. A thread within this theme was trust in the current leadership.
- Cohesion- This was a theme with “polarity of teachers” and “respect for differences of opinion and approach” named by teachers, as well as “feeling disconnected”
- Communication- transparency was a strong theme in the family group and also among staff. “Everyone is not getting the same information.”

Ideas?

- Montessori learning- Professional development, training, family engagement: these were all mentioned and called for across multiple groups as an actionable idea for the coming year.

4. Surveys

The School Overview Community Reflection Survey was completed by 44 members of the staff- 50% of those who filled it out were lead teachers and 57% of those were not yet Montessori trained.

Every member (100%) of the staff who completed the survey said they were consistently committed to all learners in the school and respond as needed to support them. This is another data point to support the theme of dedicated teaching staff listed above.

The area of least agreement was around record-keeping. Almost as many people said the school doesn't have a clear, shared way of record-keeping (27.3%) as believe there is already a consistent, shared way of record-keeping (29.5%) in use across the school.

The survey ended with two open-ended questions: 'What else would you like to share about your school?' and 'If you could change anything about your school, what would you change?'

Across the 44 people who responded came a wide range of responses to these questions, however the themes were: Montessori learning and school climate.

The Family Survey was completed by 102 members of the community with 43 families of Elementary I students, 51 families of Children's House students and 17 families of 4th graders and 3 families of children in a self-contained program.

It came out strongly that the children feel connected to the school, and families only slightly less so.

The Family survey ended with two open-ended questions: 'What is a strength you love about George Washington Elementary School?' and 'What is a suggestion you have for George Washington Elementary School?'

Across the 102 people who responded came a variety of responses to these questions, however the themes were: Montessori program, school climate, communication and with and diversity.

Both the surveys provided ample information to get a clear picture of both the assets and the challenges at George Washington Elementary. Staff and families were articulate and often provided lengthy entries showing their passion for the school.

Commendations:

- The school clearly holds children at the center, respectfully welcoming them as they are to the community. As a result, children are happy to come to school and joyfully engage in the learning tasks set out for them by their teachers.
- The staff are committed to their students and continue to work daily to reach them. In addition, most of the staff are connected to their team and either collaborate with them, or wish to have more time together for co-planning. They are seen by families as hard working and dedicated teachers.

- The school leader has taken the Montessori administrative credential and therefore has the knowledge to employ strong leadership within a Montessori setting. There are also district funds to support training for more members of the community.

Recommendations:

- Montessori Teachers: Currently, 60% of lead teachers are not Montessori trained at the level they teach. This inhibits the school's ability to fully implement Montessori across all classrooms and leads the teachers to rely on traditional curriculum. This likely contributes to the experienced lack of cohesion as well as the sense of divide within the school for the teachers as well as the families. In addition to providing Montessori education to all children in the school (rather than some), creating a pathway for all teachers to complete Montessori training will support closing the divide within the community.
- Curriculum: With not all teachers trained to teach Montessori, Montessori materials are not available or in use for learning in all classrooms. There is variation in amount, diversity and how well maintained the materials are across classrooms. Montessori materials, and having a trained teacher to introduce them, represent the curriculum and as a public school these should be offered equally across all classrooms. Therefore, redistribution of materials and ordering new materials for those missing, damaged or incomplete is a priority for George Washington Elementary.
- Work Cycle: Implementation of the Montessori method means teachers are offering individual lessons in Children's House and small group lessons in Elementary. These lessons then turn into work the children do to continue their learning across an open period of time, often known as a work cycle in the Montessori community, where they are able to repeat important materials, practice new skills and collaborate with others. When the school day is broken up into blocks of time directed by the adults, it doesn't allow children this extended time for learning and growth. As noted above, there is a wide range in length of work cycles across classrooms with the average being 37 minutes which is 1/5th of the time needed to see the model implemented. There needs to be clear understanding and messaging around the Montessori work cycle to bring all classrooms to a 2 ½ hour work cycle. In addition, the school schedule needs to support this through the careful crafting of timing for special classes (art, music, PE) lunch and recess. The school-wide structure of a schedule that allows for this time will support educators in implementing this part of the Montessori method.
- Professional development: Without on-going professional development in Montessori, teachers are not able to grow in their practice. All building adults need orientation and development on the Montessori approach in order to create a cohesive community that shares a mission and vision. Lead teachers need on-going guidance from a Montessori trained coach who is able to support their individual growth. Additionally, level teams, as well as the full staff, need regular support for calibration and professional growth. A carefully constructed year-long professional development calendar tailored to meet the needs of the community allows time for this work to be done across a school year rather than in isolated pockets of time or not at all. Families would also benefit from on-going opportunities to learn about the unique education offered to their children. Having regular touch points for the community to come together and forward their understanding of the method will support greater community cohesion as well.

Specific Suggestions:

1. Montessori training
 - a. Work with the staff to understand who is ready to attend Montessori training
 - b. Create an RFP for Montessori training in your district and use a training center selection rubric to select a program that matches the needs of your community

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- c. Fund and host the training so that all staff have access to the learning necessary to fully implement Montessori
2. Montessori materials
 - a. Create a Montessori materials inventory document for each classroom and complete it to evaluate the amount and quality of the materials available for student learning.
 - b. Purchase new materials to supply each room with a full complement of Montessori materials
3. Work cycle
 - a. Create a schedule that allows for a 2 ½ hour uninterrupted work cycle at all levels
 - b. Offer professional development and coaching to support teachers' understanding of the how to run a work cycle
 - c. Move from large group instruction to individual (Children's House) or small group (Elementary) lessons reaching children in their zone of proximal development.
4. Professional Development
 - a. Hire a Montessori trained coach to work with all teachers
 - b. Build a professional development calendar for staff that centers Montessori
 - c. Offer a Family Engagement series of events that focus on Montessori

Appendix:

Tools:

1. [Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public School Sector.](#)
2. [School Overview Observation Tool](#)
3. [School Overview Stakeholder Reflections](#)
4. Surveys
 - a. [School Overview Community Reflection Survey](#)
 - b. [Family Survey](#)

2022-2023 Family Engagement Opportunities

1. Back to School Night September 28
2. Trunk or Treat October 28
3. GW Family Fall Festival November 2
4. Science Night-STEM November 11
5. Education Week November 14-18-Families are invited to spend time in the classrooms
6. Polar Express Family Night December 16
7. GW Walking School Bus On going-teacher and parents participate and volunteer
8. Family Cultural Celebration and Food Event January 20
9. GW Family School Dance March 10
10. GW Family and Community Garden Spring and Fall
11. Concert- Winter and Spring

[Essential Elements Rubric for Montessori in the Public Sector](#)

This self-study was completed by the Principal of George Washington Elementary, Wanda Lobianco. The results correlate with the Essential Elements of Successful Montessori Schools in the Public School Sector listed above.

[Montessori Essentials](#)

The Montessori Public Policy Initiative collaborated with other Montessori organizations to develop this document that summarizes the essential components of a Montessori school. As a short, succinct summary of what is needed, it can act as a guide for any community to understand progress towards full implementation.