

# **An Evaluation of Montessori Education in South Carolina's Public Schools**

## 2015-2016 Student Demographics Summary

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## Report Highlights

This report presents findings from a demographic analysis of Montessori enrollment, as part of a comprehensive study of public school Montessori education in South Carolina being conducted by the Riley Institute at Furman University and funded by the Self Family Foundation and the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee. Over a five-year period, this mixed-method study will develop a full understanding of how Montessori education is being implemented in South Carolina's public schools and how public school Montessori impacts a range of education stakeholders in South Carolina. It also will provide valuable information needed to guide future investment in Montessori education.

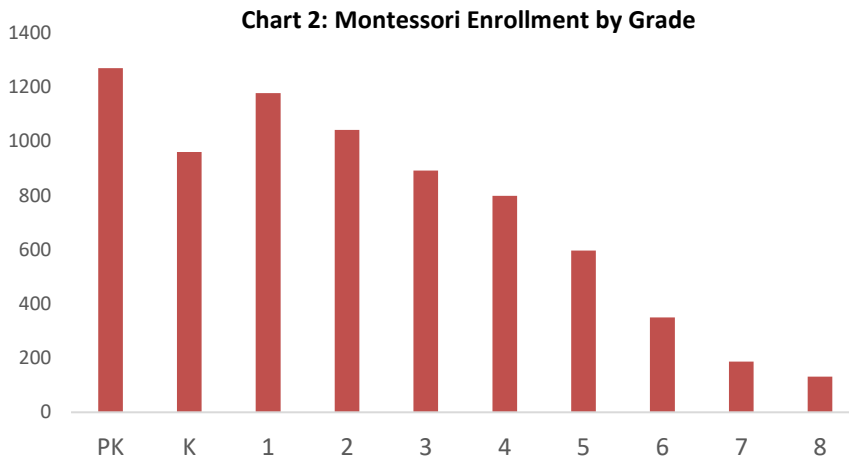
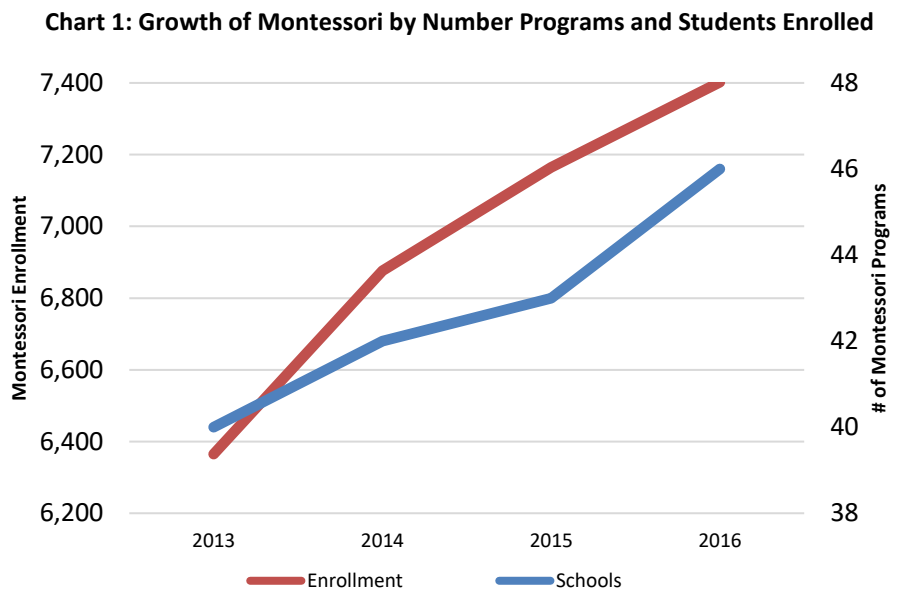
In order to conduct this analysis, researchers used existing student record databases (PowerSchool) maintained by the State Department of Education (SDE) to compare the student characteristics of Montessori students to non-Montessori public school students. These characteristics included gender, race, family income, ESL status, and special education status. Data from this aspect of the study helped at the outset of the study with control group matching and sampling, in addition to providing a general description of how Montessori students differ from the general public school student population. Extensive efforts were made by the research team to ensure proper Montessori student coding in PowerSchool so that accurate comparisons could be made.

The main findings of the analysis include:

- The number of students participating in a public Montessori program has increased since the beginning of the evaluation in 2012; the number of programs offering public Montessori has followed the same trend.
- On average, the primary and lower elementary levels have the most public Montessori students; enrollment percentages tend to decrease in the upper grades.
- While most Montessori programs in South Carolina are Title I schools and the majority of Montessori students are low-income, an analysis of student-level PowerSchool data show that Montessori students are generally more advantaged than non-Montessori public school students across the state.
- Montessori students are less likely to be designated as special education or ESL students than are non-Montessori students.
- Female participation in Montessori is slightly higher than the non-Montessori estimate.

## Montessori Enrollment by Grade and Number

- The number of students participating in a public Montessori program has increased from 6,365 in 2012-13 to 7,402 in 2015-16; the number of programs offering public Montessori has grown from 40 to 46 (see **Chart 1**)
- While the number of Pre-Kindergarten Montessori students has declined over the past three years, Montessori schooling is growing more popular in the higher grades. However, on average, the primary and lower elementary levels have the most public Montessori students; enrollment percentages tend to decrease in the upper grades



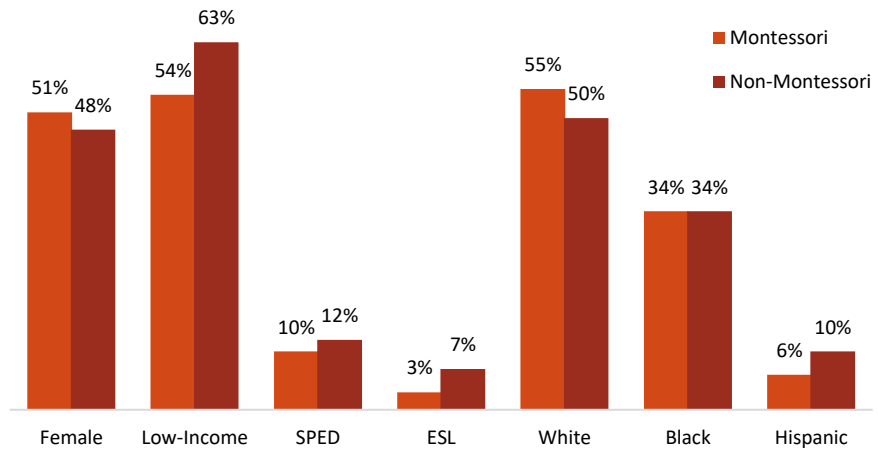
- **19%** of public Montessori students are enrolled at the pre-Kindergarten level and **15%** at the Kindergarten level; enrollment in the middle school grades (6 through 8) account for only **8%** of the total Montessori student enrollment (see **Chart 2**)

## Enrollment by Race, Income Level, Disability Status, ESL, and Gender

- **55%** of South Carolina's public Montessori students are white, while **34%** are black. Hispanic students and students of other races make up **6%** and **5%** of all public Montessori students, respectively
- When compared to non-Montessori students, white students are overrepresented in Montessori programs, and minority students are underrepresented. White students make up 50% of all non-Montessori students statewide, which is five percentage points lower than the Montessori estimate

- While approximately **63%** of all non-Montessori students are low income, only **54%** of Montessori students are low income. In addition, Montessori students are less likely to be designated as special education or ESL students than are non-

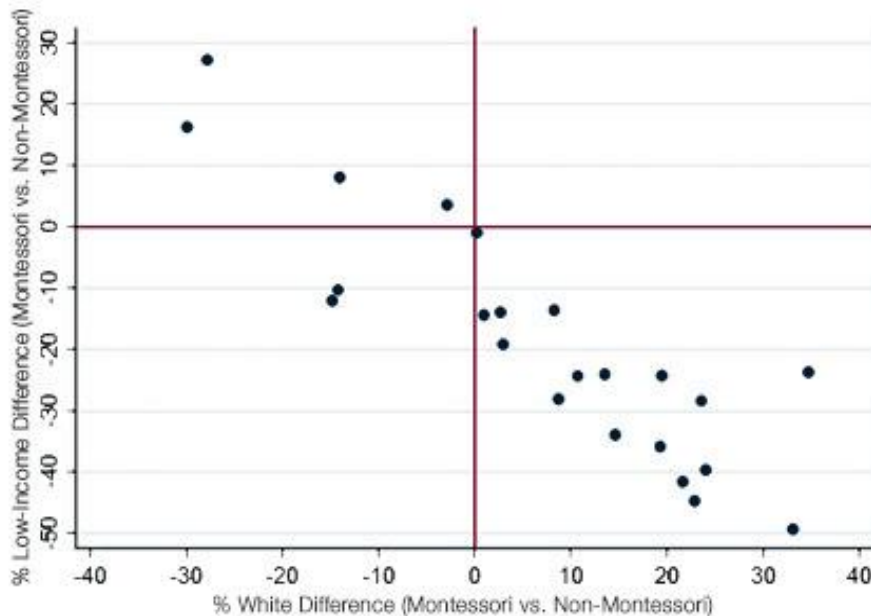
**Chart 3: Enrollment Distribution by Race, Gender, Income, Disability, and ESL**



- The above analysis compares Montessori

students to all other students in the state. However, this analysis is limited because there may be large demographic differences between districts that provide Montessori education and those that do not. See **Chart 4** for a comparison of the percentage of non-white and low income students participating in Montessori education and the percentage that are non-Montessori within each school district. The districts listed in the upper left quadrant are those in which Montessori students

**Chart 4: District Demographic Comparison**



are generally more likely to be low-income and non-white than non-Montessori students within the same district. The majority of districts are in the lower right quadrant. Montessori students in these districts are more likely to be white and not low-income than non-Montessori students in the same district.