

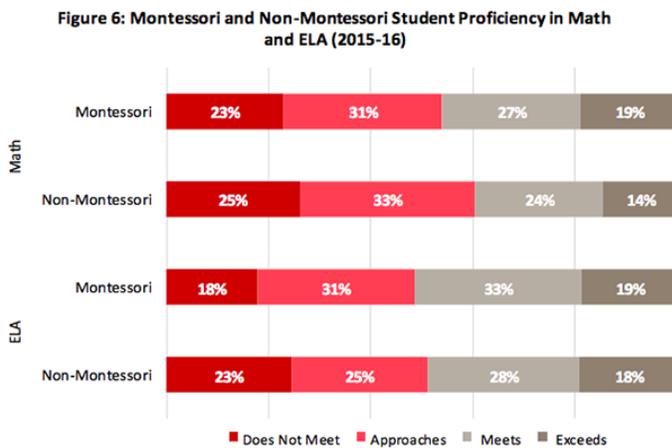
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New South Carolina Study of Public Montessori Schools Shows Majority Low-Income Students Outperforming Peers

By **KATE STRINGER** | January 28, 2018



Source: The Riley Institute

A five-year study analyzing the impact of South Carolina's nearly 50 Montessori public schools has found that their students perform significantly better than those in traditional public schools, closing the achievement gap especially for children from low-income backgrounds.

TALKING POINTS

- One of the most comprehensive studies of Montessori in the public sector shows long-term gains for students
- South Carolina has the second-largest collection of public Montessori schools in the U.S. New research shows they're doing right by kids



scores that were 6 to 8 percentage points higher. But they also bested their non-Montessori peers in the soft skills inherent to Montessori education: creativity, good behavior, and independence.

In their analysis of subgroups, the researchers looked at three years of growth across gender, race, and poverty, and matched the scores of children in Montessori schools with non-Montessori students to compare and eliminate selection bias. Low-income, non-low-income, black, white, male, and female students in Montessori schools were all subgroups that showed significantly more progress than their

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traditional schools. Researchers said this helps counter a common stereotype that Montessori education is for wealthy white students.

The study was conducted from 2012 to 2016 and included principal surveys and 126 random, unannounced classroom observations. Data from state testing, attendance, discipline records, and a creativity assessment were used to measure academic and soft skills.

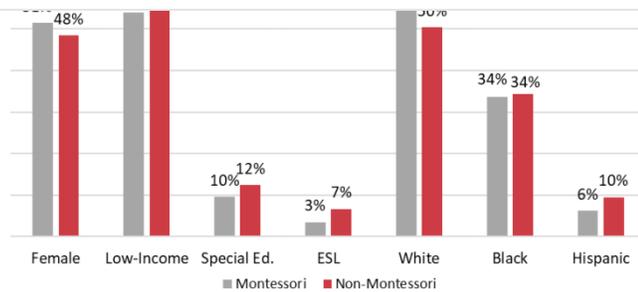
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Source: The Riley Institute

“The findings around creativity were interesting as well,” said report author Brooke Culclasure, research director of Furman University’s Riley Institute. “We want to measure these things, and it’s so important, but hard to measure.”

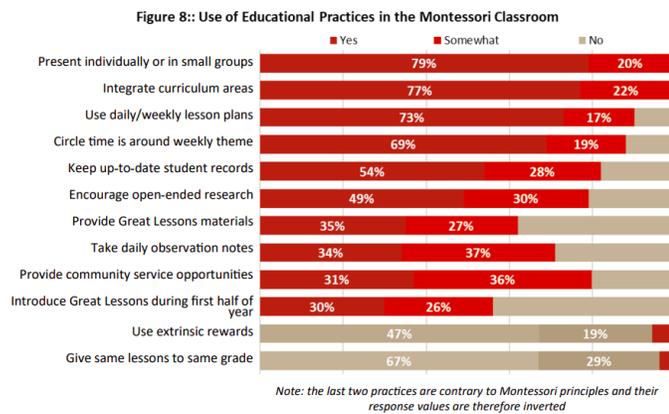
Skills like creativity and independence, more than state test scores, are what’s important to Montessori educators, Riga said.

“It’s hard to measure enjoyment of school and responsibility and independence, but anyone who has worked for any length of time in Montessori will tell you that’s what happens to the children,” she said.

The same goes for the adults — teachers in Montessori public schools are more likely to say they love their jobs than teachers in traditional schools, the study found.

Traditional Montessori education is very personalized, with students choosing their learning materials every day — from blocks to

room rather than presenting lessons.



Source: The Riley Institute

South Carolina has the largest number of public Montessori schools in the country, at 52, followed by California, with 46, and Arizona, with 42, according to the [Montessori Census](#). Its first public Montessori school opened in the mid-1990s, and in 2004, a supportive state superintendent, Inez Tenenbaum, hired Riga as the first state Montessori coordinator. Riga said it was the first position of its kind in the United States and signaled state support for public Montessori programs. As of this year, the South Carolina model has grown to 52 school sites serving over 8,500 students, mostly elementary-aged.

Researchers first measured how closely schools were adhering to the traditional Montessori model before including them in the study, and found a high rate of fidelity among the state’s schools.

because of standardized testing mandates that require test preparation. Traditional Montessori programs don't include testing, though all public schools in the state must follow testing requirements.

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It's not easy to open a Montessori school. Startup costs for materials and teacher training are significant, even though they're a one-time cost.

Organizations like the American Montessori Society help schools with teacher training and accreditation, said Executive Director Tim Purnell.

“This is really a wonderful study in terms of promoting the importance and need of

limiting Montessori to communities that can afford it.”

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