



# Understanding Why Parents Choose Montessori Education: Differences Between Public and Private Montessori School Parents



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## Abstract

- This study explored why parents choose Montessori schools for their children.
- Parents from two public and two private Montessori schools were surveyed to discern what characteristics parents valued in making their decision.
- Additionally, parents were interviewed to elicit additional information about their decision to enroll their children in Montessori schools and to confirm the results of the quantitative data.
- Comparisons were made between public and private Montessori parents' responses to explore the overarching themes and to determine differences that existed between the two types of parents.
- Public Montessori parents valued diversity and free tuition while private Montessori parents placed higher value on academic programming.
- Both types of parents indicated a desire to have their children become life-long learners through Montessori education.

## Introduction

- Previous research has indicated that school choice can lead to school improvement and reform.
- Parents will seek quality educational experiences for their children.
- Parents tend to choose schools for their children that closely match their own educational philosophy.
- School quality, location, cost, and demographics are among additional factors parents consider when choosing a school.
- Information about school choice as well as specific schools must be accessible to parents.
- The majority of Montessori schools are private, but there is a growing trend toward public Montessori schools.
- Understanding why parents choose Montessori schools can lead to more effective marketing strategies and to improved educational quality within the Montessori philosophy and in the greater school choice arena.
- The development of the public Montessori model may prove to be a new frontier in both public and Montessori education.

## Research Question

### What elements of Montessori education lead parents to choose this as the schooling option for their children?

## Methodology

- Parents were chosen from two public (n = 40) and two private (n = 10) Montessori schools located throughout the United States.
- The sample was racially, socioeconomically, and educationally diverse.
- Data were collected through a researcher-developed survey and interview.
- The researcher made comparisons between public and private Montessori parents in order to explore the overarching themes and to determine differences that existed between public and private Montessori school parents.

## Results

- Public Montessori parents valued diversity (M = 4.00, SD = 0.82), more than private Montessori parents (M = 3.30, SD = 1.06),  $t(48) = 3.181, p = .003$ .
- Private Montessori parents specifically noted the private schools' academic focus and the quality of the classroom environment as particular strengths of Montessori education.
- Public and private Montessori parents valued individual learning, student-teacher relationship, peer relationships, school safety, student-teacher ratio, and the quality of academic programming.
- Both public and private Montessori parents hoped their children would be independent, self-directed/self-motivated learners, have a strong academic foundation, have respect for others, and gain confidence through the Montessori style of learning.
- Nearly half of public Montessori parents surveyed (46.9%) would have liked to have had more information about the Montessori philosophy before enrolling their children in the program whereas the majority of private Montessori parents had all of the information they needed,

Montessori Appeal	Public (n = 40)	Private (n = 8)
Philosophy	5	4
Cost	29	1
Prefer Public	7	2
Diversity	12	0
Classroom Environment	5	3

## Information Parents Used

	Public (n = 40)	Private (n = 9)
Internet/Online	14	1
School/classroom visit	9	4
Teacher meeting	3	3
Montessori books	4	0
School-specific information	5	1
Family/friend Montessori experience	21	4
Own Montessori experience	6	0

## Implications

- Parents' perceptions of cost, diversity, and academic foundation, as well as the availability of school choice information should impact how schools market themselves to attract more students.
- Public and private schools can learn from each other's strengths and use them to continue to improve the quality of education as well as to offer parents competitive choices for schools.
- The fact that both public and private Montessori parents had similar hopes for how their children would benefit from the Montessori philosophy indicates that there may be little difference in the overall implementation of Montessori education – that both public and private Montessori schools can be effective.
- Parents may benefit from a simply-written, easily accessible summary of the basic tenets of Montessori education.

## Future Directions for Research

- Additional studies may want to take a more in-depth look at the differences between public and private Montessori programs and whether one type of school attracts specific types of students.
- It is imperative to take a closer look at both private and public Montessori schools to identify what elements of the school determine how effective the program is (i.e., school leadership, relationship to school district, opportunities available to Montessori students).
- Future research may be needed to assess how much public Montessori parents know and understand about the Montessori philosophy before enrolling their children in the programs.

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