



FAQS

What is a charter school?

The term 'charter' refers to a free public school that is formed through a businesslike contract between the charter governance board (made up of community leaders, parents, and educators) and the local school board. Wisconsin Charter Law provides for charter schools to be autonomous and innovative in return for academic accountability. The ability to waive state statute as well as board policies in return for this innovation is a hallmark of charter schools.

What is a Montessori school?

All teaching is done with three things in mind: the students, the teacher, and the classroom. Montessori also uses these three parts, with the difference being *how they* look and *how* they are presented to the child.

THE CLASSROOM

- Lightweight furniture
- Bookshelves containing hands-on activities on individual trays
- Activities that progress from easiest to hardest, simple to abstract
- Rugs used as well as tables for workspace
- Designated areas to freely choose work from, including, but not limited to: Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Math, Culture, Art, Botany, and Zoology

THE CHILDREN

- Learn at their own speed and progress
- Decide what they want to work on within the parameters of the space and materials
- Work individually or in pairs
- Enjoy freedom of movement within the rules of the classroom
- Gain self-motivation, which produces joy in learning
- Teach each other in a multi-age setting that typically consists of pre-K/Kindergarten, 1st-3rd grade, and 4th-6th grade classrooms
- Are the primary focus, not the teacher
- Display cooperation and empathy rather than competition

THE TEACHER

- Prepares the room to look inviting to the child
- Models the behaviors and attitudes she/he is trying to instill
- Small group lessons are given to present each material
- Sets and maintains firm limits while empathizing with the child
- Is warm, kind, calm and polite, and respectful to each child
- Observes children's learning and behavior to determine their needs
- Keeps careful records of what materials each child has mastered or is ready for

What is the history of the Viroqua Area Montessori School?

The desire to have a Montessori charter elementary school in the Viroqua region began in 2009 with a small group of committed parents spearheading the initiative. With full support of the Viroqua School Board, a Planning Grant was submitted to the state in the spring of 2010 but was unsuccessful. Rather than giving up, this group built upon the interest and immediate need and with one trained Montessori teacher in their midst, a private Montessori Children's House serving ages 1-6 was developed. As the number of families seeing the benefits of Montessori increased, in the late summer of 2012 it became clear that the desire for a charter elementary was still strong and the following spring another Planning Grant was submitted and this time was successful. After a solid year of planning, observing area schools, recruiting and training teachers, and completely outfitting two classrooms, we opened our doors in the fall of 2014. We were also awarded a subsequent Implementation Grant to continue the development of our school. In August, 2021, the Adolescent classroom was added for 7th grade, and expanded to 8th grade in August, 2022.

How can children learn if they're free to do whatever they want?

Dr. Maria Montessori observed that children are more motivated to learn when working on something of their own choosing. A Montessori student may choose his focus of learning on any given day, but his decision is limited by the materials and activities—in each area of the curriculum—that his teacher has prepared and presented to him. This means freedom within the parameters of the classroom. As they move from kindergarten into the elementary grades, students typically set learning goals and create personal work plans in the areas of math, language, and other core subjects each week or month 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 his learning by building on skills and knowledge already gained. This gentle guidance helps him master the challenge at hand—and protects him from moving on before he's ready, which is what actually causes children to "fall behind."

What type of work is done in a Montessori classroom?

Below are some links to videos and resources showing the type of work that is done in the classroom using the Montessori method of teaching.

- [Montessori for Elementary Aged Children \(produced by the American Montessori Society\)](#)
- [A peek inside a Montessori classroom \(preview to the documentary Building the Pink Tower\)](#)
- [Sample Montessori Math Lesson: Ten Board](#)
- [A list of Parent Resources developed by Wikisori.org, a website dedicated to the collaboration among Montessori teachers](#)

Where is the school located?

Viroqua Area Montessori School is a charter school that shares a campus with the Viroqua Elementary School and Viroqua Middle School in Viroqua, WI.

What grades does the school serve?

In 2014 Viroqua Area Montessori School began with two multi-age classrooms. One classroom serving 4-Kindergarten and Kindergarten and the other classroom serving 1st through 3rd grade. We currently have seven classrooms serving 4K through 8th grade students.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For additional information on Montessori we recommend the following links:

- [American Montessori Society](#)
- [Association Montessori International / USA](#)
- [See it in Action!](#) (video resources from a variety of Montessori schools and supporters)

FAMOUS MONTESSORIANS

Believe it or not, but all of the following well-known adults have a background in Montessori education.

- Larry Page and Sergey Brin – Founders of the Internet search engine Google.com. [Watch their interview on Montessori education.](#)
- William Wright – American computer game designer whose greatest success to date is as the original designer for The Sims games series; the best-selling PC game in history.
- Jeffrey P. Bezos – Founder of Amazon.com, the most dominant retailer on the Internet. By his mother's account, the young Jeffrey got so engrossed in the details of activities at his Montessori school that teachers had to pick him up in his chair to move him to new tasks.
- Jimmy Wales – Co-founder of Wikipedia. As a child, Wales was an avid reader with an acute intellectual curiosity. He credits this to the influence of the Montessori Method on the school's philosophy of education. He says he "spent lots of hours poring over the Britannicas and World Book Encyclopedias."
- Gabriel Garcia Marquez – Nobel Prize for Literature winner attended Montessori de Aracataca for five years and credited his time there with making him fall in love with language. He said that Montessori Education gave him the desire to "kiss literature" and "the taste instilled to him to go to the school, not only see literature, but to write it."
- Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis – Editor for Doubleday, this former first lady attended a Montessori school where she was initially described as a "headstrong child." Through her time there, she learned to focus her behavior and academic pursuits.
- Anne Frank – Renowned World War II diarist. According to her friend Hanneli Goslar, Anne showed aptitude for reading and writing at an early age, a talent that was nurtured in her Montessori school. She frequently wrote at school, and was outspoken, energetic, and extroverted, telling all, from a young age, that one day she wanted to be a published author.
- Beyonce Knowles – American Pop/R&B singer, songwriter, actress and fashion designer. Born and raised in Houston, Texas, she attended St. Mary of the Purification Montessori School for her elementary years.
- Joshua Bell – American violinist and the owner of a Stradivarius violin, he began taking violin lessons at the age of four after his mother discovered her son had taken rubber bands from around the house and stretched them across the handles of his dresser drawer to pluck out music he had heard her play on the piano.
- Peter Drucker – Management guru, known as the father of modern management. A prolific writer, business consultant and lecturer, he introduced many management concepts that corporations around the world have embraced.
- David Blaine – Magician, endurance artist and advocate of "street magic."
- Alan Rickman – Renowned English stage actor and theater director known for his modern and classical productions. A former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, he is known best for film performances such as Severus Snape in the *Harry Potter* film series.
- George Clooney – Academy Award-winning actor and activist.
- Julia Child – First world-famous television chef who clearly enjoyed her work. She credited her Montessori experience with her love of working with her hands, finding fun in her work, and her

joy of working with others.

- Helen Hunt – Academy Award-winning actress.
- Prince William – Son of Prince Charles and Princess Diana of Wales
- Prince Harry – Son of Prince Charles and Princess Diana of Wales
- Chelsea Clinton – Daughter of former President Bill and Hillary Clinton
- Princess Eugenie of York – Daughter of Prince Andrew, Duke of York and Sarah, Duchess of York

We thank the author of Montessori Answers for compiling this list.

GLOSSARY OF MONTESSORI TERMS

Below is a list of terms commonly used in the Montessori environment. Check back as the list continues to grow!

Absorbent mind – The first plane of development where the child has the capability to absorb large amounts of information about their environment through their senses. During this plane of development children acquire language, develop motor and cognitive skills, copy the social skills of adults, and learn expectations of how the world will treat them.

Control of error – Montessori materials are designed so that the child receives instant feedback as he works, allowing him to recognize, correct, and learn from his mistakes without adult assistance. Putting control of the activity in the child's hands strengthens his self-esteem and self-motivation as well as his learning.

Conscious absorption – The second plane of development when children are still able to absorb much of the environment around them, but are also beginning to focus inward, becoming aware of the choices they can make, and the desire to do so.

Conscious mind – When a person is aware and is thinking or acting deliberately, choosing one thought, action, or object over another based on the information he/she gathered from their surrounding environment.

Cosmic education – Maria Montessori urged us to give elementary-level children a “vision of the universe” to help them discover how all parts of the cosmos are interconnected and interdependent. In Montessori schools, these children, ages 6 – 12, begin by learning about the universe, its galaxies, our galaxy, our solar system, and planet Earth—everything that came before their birth to make their life possible. As they develop respect for past events, they become aware of their own roles and responsibilities in the global society of today and tomorrow.

Directed choice – gives a child the opportunity to choose between two equally attractive and positive actions, objects, or activities.

Erdkinder – German for “child of the earth,” this term describes a Montessori learning environment for adolescents ages 12 – 15 that connects them with nature and encourages them to form a society of their own; often designed as a working farm school.

Grace and courtesy – Children are formally instructed in social skills they will use throughout their lives, for example, saying “please” and “thank you,” interrupting conversations politely, requesting rather than demanding assistance, and greeting guests warmly.

Normalization – A word used to describe when children are able to focus and concentrate for

extended periods of time and have a sense of satisfaction about their work.

Pincer grasp – Refers to the thumb-and-forefinger motion that’s involved for manipulating small items.

Planes of development – Four distinct periods of growth, development, and learning that build on each other as children and youth progress through them: ages 0 – 6 (the period of the “absorbent mind”); 6 – 12 (the period of reasoning and abstraction); 12 – 18 (when youth construct the “social self,” developing moral values and becoming emotionally independent); and 18 – 24 years (when young adults construct an understanding of the self and seek to know their place in the world).

Practical life – A series of fine motor skills that include cleaning and caring for the environment, preparing food, and personal hygiene and self-care. Practical life skills are of great interest to young children and form the basis of later abstract learning.

Prepared environment – Designed so that the child has the maximum ability for learning and exploration. The phrase ‘prepared environment’ refers to a well-thought out environment, classroom or home, designed with the child in mind. The goal of the prepared environment is to foster independence in the child.

Rightness for the task – the child sees a need in the environment he/she is able to find the right materials to fill and carry out the need without an adult’s intervention.

Sensitive period – A critical time during human development when the child is biologically ready and receptive to acquiring a specific skill or ability—such as the use of language or a sense of order—and is therefore particularly sensitive to stimuli that promote the development of that skill. A Montessori teacher prepares the environment to meet the developmental needs of each sensitive period.

Sensorial exercises – These activities develop and refine the 5 senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling—and build a foundation for speech, writing, and math through the use of sensorial materials. The exercises also bring order to the barrage of sensorial impressions the child experiences from birth onward.

The 3-period lesson – A 3-step technique for presenting information to the child. In the first—the *introduction* or *naming* period—the teacher demonstrates what “this is.” (The teacher might say “This is a mountain” while pointing to it on a 3-dimensional map.) In the second—the *association* or *recognition* period—the teacher asks the child to “show” what was just identified (“Show me the mountain”). Finally, in the *recall* period, the teacher asks the child to name the object or area. Moving from new information to passive recall to active identification reinforces the child’s learning and demonstrates her mastery.

Work – Purposeful activity. Maria Montessori observed that children learn through purposeful activities of their own choosing; Montessori schools call all of the children’s activities “work.” When children are able to choose their activity, they do not see any difference between work and play.

References:

[American Montessori Society’s website.](#)

Maren Schmidt with Dana Schmidt, *Understanding Montessori: A Guide for Parents*. 2009.

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