



Validation Project Handbook

Mission

Uniting the Montessori voice in Colorado.

The Validation Project Overview

There is no trademark or copyright protection on the use of “Montessori” in the public domain. Any school or program may call itself Montessori even when lacking in any of the elements that would be considered necessary to implement the system of education as taught in accredited or nationally recognized Montessori Teacher Preparation Programs. It is for this reason that the CMA Validation Project was created.

The goal of the CMA Validation Project is to give schools the opportunity to demonstrate that they demonstrate the essential standards¹ of a Montessori school. These CMA threshold standards were determined by the CMA Validation Project Committee representing Montessori educators across the state. The standards were approved by the Board of Directors in the Spring of 2017.

The Benefits

Families can be assured that a Validated Montessori program includes the essential components necessary in a high-fidelity Montessori program.

The Colorado Department of Education and Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS) can be assured that the Montessori schools in the state have agreed to a basic standard for defining Montessori. This standard provides an accountability measure which increases trust in the health, safety, and quality of the CMA validated programs they license and approve.

CDHS is providing an Administrative Materials waiver for schools which have met the criteria for validation by the Colorado Montessori Association. In addition to providing meaning to what a Montessori school is in our state, CDHS has demonstrated a significant amount of trust in CMA to provide a level of accountability in the safety and health of our early childhood classrooms.

Montessori Schools can be assured that the use of the name “Montessori” has meaning. Validated schools present a threshold level of quality that will assure families and the state agencies that they can be trusted to provide a Montessori education with essential components. Validation can be a tool for marketing to prospective families and potential employees.

¹ The Montessori Public Policy Initiative: a collaborative between AMI-USA and AMS. Montessori Essentials. November, 2015

Standards for Validation

Each classroom must have the following to be validated as a Montessori school by the Colorado Montessori Association:

1. A philosophical approach that is consistent with the evidenced-based educational methods as taught by the scientific observations, research, writings, and instruction of Dr. Maria Montessori and consistent with AMI, AMS or MACTE accredited training programs.
2. At least one lead teacher in each classroom with a Montessori credential from an AMS, AMI or MACTE accredited teacher preparation program, at the level being taught.
3. A mixed-age group of students based on the Montessori Planes of Development (consistent with teacher education preparation programs/practicums, and national organizations).
4. A Montessori curriculum and the instructional materials required to implement a proper Montessori program for each early childhood class.
5. A daily schedule that provides an uninterrupted work period of 2-3 hours (with 3 being the ideal). Enrichment programs and transition times are scheduled to accommodate these work periods.
6. An established student/teacher ratio and group size consistent with the State of Colorado Early Childhood Licensing requirements.
7. Meet all federal, state, and local regulatory and statutory requirements for the health and safety of the students.
8. Must be a current member of the Colorado Montessori Association.

CMA Validation Project Policies

Participating Programs

All Montessori schools in Colorado are eligible to participate in the project. Schools must be members of the Colorado Montessori Association. Private and public Montessori schools may participate. Please note that a school must have had children enrolled in the program for 12 months prior to participation in the Validation Project. CMA is not currently validating in-home Montessori programs. Please note that at this time, only primary programs are eligible for the Validation project. CMA hopes to be able to expand validation to toddler programs in the future.

Fees

The current fee for validation is \$150.00 for the first classroom. Each additional classroom is \$20.00.

Project Staff and Volunteers

All applications and processes will go through the CMA Board Project Coordinator. Verifier Team members and the Recommendation Committee are volunteers and are trained and clearly understand their role and responsibilities. Each volunteer in a position is required to sign a Confidentiality Form and Code of Conduct form and will not share any information regarding a school with anyone not working directly with the Validation Project.

Verifiers

These volunteers are Montessori credentialed educators with a minimum of three (3) years of classroom experience at the level they are observing.

Verification Team On-Site Visits are strictly to verify that the information and documentation provided in the Administrator and Classroom Questionnaires is accurate. The team is not observing to judge, assess quality, or consult with school staff. Verifiers will receive professional development credits for each on-site visit they complete.

Term of Validation

A school's validation is in effect for five (5) years. Each validated school will be required to complete an annual renewal checklist (\$25) to maintain validation status. The school may maintain its validation without an additional on-site visit unless there are substantial changes in documentation such as a new director, a new classroom teacher, a change in building, or changes to the structure of the program (additional levels or classroom) or standing with the CO Department of Education or CDHS.

A school must participate in the full process every 5 years for renewal of its validation.

Any change in director, lead classroom teacher, building or structure of the program, such as change in mixed age group, new classrooms, or standing with CDHS, must be reported to CMA immediately. Contact the Validation Project Coordinator. Failure to comply will result in revoking of the school's validation and CDHS will be notified.

Process for School Participation

A Montessori school which voluntarily chooses to participate in the CMA Validation Project will:

- Complete the CMA Validation Project Application with payment and submit for review by the Project Coordinator.
- When the completed application and payment has been received through the CMA website, the application will be reviewed. CMA will also verify the school is in good standing with local licensing.
- If the school meets initial criteria for validation, CMA will send the School Director and Classroom Questionnaires to be filled out by the School within two (2) weeks of receipt.
- The School will then complete the School Director and Classroom Questionnaires and return these completed to CMA with all required supporting documentation. Completed applications will include:
 1. School director questionnaire
 2. Teacher questionnaire for each primary classroom
 3. The lead teacher's Montessori credentials
 4. Classroom rosters (birthdates only)
 5. Classroom daily schedules
 6. Materials lists
 7. The Policy and Procedure for the cleanup of breakables
 8. Parental consent form to Montessori materials in use
- The Project Coordinator will review all information received. If complete, the Project Coordinator will send the application materials to the Readers for review. If the Questionnaires and Documentation packet is not complete or the school does not meet the essential standards to become validated, the coordinator will notify the school of it's circumstances.
- The Readers will review the School Director and Classroom Questionnaires using a specific rubric to identify whether or not the school meets the essential components of a high-fidelity Montessori program. If any additional clarification or information is requested, the school will be contacted by the Project Coordinator.
- The Project Coordinator will coordinate the onsite visit by contacting the school and verification team to schedule an on-site visit date to occur within four to six (4-6) weeks of receipt of the *completed and approved packet*. The school and the verification team will each sign a Non- Conflict of Interest form prior to the visit.
- The Verification Team will conduct an on-site visit to verify that the information submitted in the Administrator Questionnaire and Classroom Questionnaire is accurate and that the classroom philosophy and curriculum implementation are consistent with CMA Validation Project Standards.
- The Verification Team will submit its report to the Project Coordinator within two (2)

weeks of its on-site visit.

- The Recommendation Committee will review the report and verifiers' recommendations within three weeks (3) for final approval.
- CMA Board will vote on approval at the next CMA Board meeting following the Recommendation Committee's review.
- The school will be notified of its validation status and will be sent a Certificate of CMA Validation by the Project Coordinator within one (1) week of approval.
- The Project Coordinator will inform CDHS when a school is validated.

Validation Project Steps

Steps	Time Frame	Validation Team Member
1. Submission of application & fees		Project Coordinator
2. School questionnaire & documentation	Within 2 weeks of application & fee payment	Project Coordinator
3. On Site Visit Scheduled	When the questionnaire and ALL OF THE DOCUMENTATION requested in the CMA packet is received, it will be sent to the Reader. With final Reader approval, an on-site visit will take place within 4-6 weeks.	Project Coordinator
4. Reader and Verifier Team	Receives questionnaires and materials lists for review.	Project Coordinator
5. On-site Visit	Return completed on-site report within 2 weeks of visit	Verifier Team
6. Review for approval by the Recommendation Committee	Within 3 week of receipt of on-site reports	Recommendation Committee
7. CMA BOard APproval Vote	At the CMA Board meeting following the review by the Recommendation Committee	Recommendation Committee
8. Validation Certificate	Within 1 week of receipt of approval form	Project Coordinator

Validation Project Volunteer Staff Roles and Responsibilities

All staff for the Validation Project are volunteers from the Montessori community who donate their time in support of quality Montessori education in the state.

The Project Coordinator: is the overall administrator of the project. It is their responsibility to:

- Review all applications received and send the Validation Project packet to the school within 2 weeks of receipt of the application.
- Verify that CMA has received the application fee through the CMA website.
- Review the completed School Director Questionnaire, Classroom Questionnaire and supporting documentation. If any piece is missing, or the project standards are not met, the coordinator will contact the school.
- If the Validation Project packet is complete and all documentation is provided, the coordinator will send the Questionnaires to the Reader and Verification Team for their review.
- Once the Validation packet is approved by the Reader and Verifiers, the Project Coordinator will coordinate with the school and Verification Team to schedule an on-site visit.
- Once the on-site visit has taken place, the Verification Team will send their completed report and recommendations to the Project Coordinator. This report will then be sent to the Approval Committee for its final approval of the school's validation.

Reader: A Montessori credentialed educator with a minimum of three years of classroom experience at the level of classroom being validated. The Reader will review the School Director and Classroom Questionnaires using the rubrics appropriate to the level being evaluated. This will be returned to the Project Coordinator.

Verification Teams: The Verification Teams are a minimum of two Montessori educators with a minimum of three years of classroom experience at the classroom level they are observing. These teams review the Questionnaires and accompanying documentation and conduct an on-site visit to verify that the information provided by a school is accurate and meets the Validation Project standards. Their responsibilities include:

1. Reviewing the School Director and Classroom Questionnaires prior to the on-site visit to determine that the school meets the Validation Project Standards.
2. Completing a morning on-site visit that includes a separate 30 minute observation by each verifier in each classroom seeking validation. A brief interview with the school director will also take place.
3. Verify that all information provided by the school is accurate by observing the classroom and reviewing all written documentation during a visit to the school. Both members of the team must observe each classroom being validated and both must review the documentation.
4. Within 2 weeks, submit their completed Report and Recommendation to the Project Coordinator.

Recommendation Committee: This committee of 3 Montessori educators makes the recommendation for final approval to be voted on by the Colorado Montessori Association Board. This committee oversees compliance with all requirements of a Validating Organization. Their responsibilities include:

1. Overseeing all processes, records, and documentation of the CMA Validation Project.
2. Reviewing the Verification Team's Report and Recommendations.
3. Determining a school's initial Validation status and giving final recommendation for approval to the CMA Board for the Certificate of Validation.
4. Determining a school's annual and reevaluation Validation status and process.

Validation Peer Coach: A school wishing to become validated but does not yet meet all essential components, may ask to have a peer coach. As collaborators, the school director and the peer coach can design a Validation Plan for the school. This plan will outline how the school plans to meet all essential standards in the Validation Project.

A Validation Peer Coach is a Montessori educator with a minimum of 3 years of experience at the level being validated. The Coach is also familiar with the CMA Validation Project. The Coach will work with the school director and/or the level teachers to guide the school in meeting the essential standards. The Coach is not a consultant to the school regarding the operation, functioning, or quality of the school or its programs.

Validation Project Levels

Accredited Montessori Schools: Montessori schools which are accredited, or recognized, by a national Montessori organization can apply for an automatic Certificate of Validation (with no fee) by submitting a copy of their accreditation or recognition with their application.

Validated Montessori Schools: Montessori schools which successfully complete the CMA Validation Project will receive a Certificate of Validation and will receive all benefits of validation.

Mentored Montessori Schools: Montessori schools which would like to complete the CMA Validation Project but which do not yet meet all criteria for validation may choose to work with the Validation Peer Coaching Team. The school will be assigned a coach and together they will determine a Validation Action Plan time frame for preparing the school to meet all standards required in the Validation Project.

Documentation Needs:

CDHS has approved an Administrative waiver - choking hazards (i.e., “chokeables”) ([7.702.62E](#)) and laceration hazards (i.e., “breakables”) ([7.702.62G](#)), and sharp objects/materials ([7.702.81.C](#)) for all Montessori schools which successfully complete the CMA Validation Project. As part of this process, the following documentation must be provided to CMA:

- Parental/Guardian/Family Consent Form – Acknowledgement of materials
- Policy and Procedure for Clean-up of Breakables
- Readiness Assessment Tool - The process by which the school determines a child is ready to participate in a primary classroom that contains a full complement of materials.