



Colorado Montessori Association  
*Giving Montessori a Voice in Colorado*

## Validation Project Handbook

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## **Mission**

The Colorado Montessori Association is a powerful voice for Montessori advocacy providing a forum for networking and professional growth in the Montessori community. It is a highly functioning, evolving professional organization unified in its vision, respectful, purposeful, and inclusive.

## **The Validation Project Overview**

The goal of the CMA Validation Project is to give participating schools the opportunity to demonstrate that they include the essential standards<sup>1</sup> of a Montessori school. These CMA threshold standards were determined by the CMA Validation Project Committee, representing Montessori educators across the state and were approved by the Board of Directors in Spring 2017.

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.

## **The Benefits**

**Families** can be assured that a Validated Montessori program includes the essentials necessary for a program to meet, or exceed, a basic level of quality.

**The CO 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 of 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 national Montessori organizations- AMI, AMS, IMC, MEPI).
2. At least one lead teacher, in each classroom, with a Montessori credential from a MACTE accredited teacher preparation program, or AMI teacher preparation program, at the level being taught.
3. A developmentally appropriate 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, areas of instruction, and instructional material requirements to implement the program for each class and age grouping taught.
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 Montessori system of education (and as recommended by AMI, AMS, IMC, and MEPI) for each class and age grouping taught. \*
7. A program leader, with a Montessori credential, who contributes to decision making on an administrative level on policies and procedures as they relate to Montessori philosophy, pedagogy, curriculum, and implementation of a high- fidelity Montessori program. (For example: educational coordinator, level coordinator, Montessori curriculum coach, and/or mentor/master Montessori educator.)
8. Meet all federal, state, and local regulatory and statutory requirements for the health and safety of the students.

\*A school may be unable to have a class size group and ratios consistent with the Montessori system of education due to state regulations and statutes. However, the school should have an ideal group size and ratio they would like to have if not for the state regulations.

## **CMA Validation Project Policies:**

### **Participating Programs**

All Montessori schools in Colorado are eligible to participate in the project. The project will initially validate Montessori Primary Early Childhood classrooms. Expansion will include Infant/Toddler and Elementary I and II classrooms and secondary programs.

Private and public Montessori schools may participate. CMA is not validating in-home Montessori programs at this time.

### **Fees**

The current fee for validation is \$150.00 for the first classroom. Each additional classroom is \$20.00 for CMA member schools. Non-member schools will be charged 10% more. These fees will be used to reimburse Verifier Teams and maintain a project that is financially sustainable for CMA.

### **Project Staff and Volunteers**

The CMA Administrative Assistant serves as the Program coordinator. All Verifier Team members, and the Approval 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**

The Readers and Verifier Team members are Montessori credentialed educators with a minimum of three (3) years of classroom experience at the level of classroom they are observing.

Verifier Team On-Site Visits are strictly to verify that the information and documentation provided in the School Questionnaire 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.

CMA will reimburse mileage (at current IRS rate) and a meal (up to \$ 12.50) for each verifier. A reimbursement form will be provided.

### **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 (\$40 fee, \$25 for CMA School members) to maintain

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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 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 within 30 days of any change. Contact the CMA Administrative Assistant/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:

1. Complete the CMA Validation Project Application with payment and submit for review by the Project Coordinator.
2. When the completed application and payment through CMA website has been received, CMA will send the school the electronic School Questionnaire and Classroom Questionnaires within one (1) week of receipt.
3. Complete the School and Classroom Questionnaires and return to CMA with all required supporting documentation including copies of lead teacher's Montessori credentials, classroom rosters (birthdates only), classroom daily schedules, and materials lists and program documentation regarding policies and procedures, and an example of the parental consent form used.
4. The Project Coordinator will review all information received and if complete, will send to the Reader and Verifier team for review. If the School Questionnaire and Documentation packet is not complete, or the school does not meet the essential standards to become validated, the coordinator will let the school know what is needed prior to the onsite visit.
5. The Reader and Verifier Team will review the Classroom Questionnaire using a level specific rubric to identify the key components of a Montessori philosophy and curriculum implementation. If any additional clarification or information is requested, the school will be contacted by the Project Coordinator.
6. The Project Coordinator will coordinate the onsite visit by contacting the school and verifier team to schedule an on-site visit date to occur within four (4) weeks of receipt of the completed and approved packet. The school and the verifier team will each sign a Non- Conflict of Interest form prior to the visit.

7. The Verifier Team will provide an on-site visit to verify that the information submitted in the School Questionnaire and Classroom Questionnaire is accurate and that the classroom philosophy and curriculum implementation are consistent with CMA Validation Project Standards.

8. The Verifier Team will submit its report to the Project Coordinator within two weeks of its on-site visit.

9. The Validation Approval Committee will review the report and verifiers' recommendations within three weeks (3) for final approval.

10. The school will be notified of its validation status and will be sent a Certificate of CMA Validation by the Project Coordinator.

11. The Project Coordinator will inform CDHS when a school is validated.

#### Validation Project Steps

Steps	Time Frame	Validation Team Member
1. Submission of application & fee		Project Coordinator
2. School questionnaire & documentation	Within 1 week of application & fee payment	Project Coordinator
3. On Site Visit Scheduled	When the questionnaire and documentation is received, it will be sent to the Reader and Verifier Team. With final approval, an onsite visit will be scheduled to take place within 4 weeks. (Time will vary depending on any additional documentation requirements.)	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. Approval of Approval Committee	Within 1 week of receipt of on-site reports	Approval Committee
7. 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.

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

- Review all applications received and send the Validation Project packet to the school within 1 week of receipt of the application.
- Verify that CMA has received the application fee through PayPal.
- Review the completed School Questionnaire, Classroom Questionnaire and supporting documentation. If any piece is missing, or the project standards are not met, the coordinator will contact the school to communicate needs and/or status.
- If the Validation Project packet is complete and all documentation is provided, the coordinator will send the Classroom Questionnaires to the Reader and Verifier Team for their review.
- Once the Validation packet is approved by the reader and verifiers, the Project Coordinator will coordinate with the school and verifier team to schedule an on-site visit.
- Once the on-site visit has taken place, the Verifier Team will send their completed report and recommendations to the coordinator. This report will then be sent to the Approval Committee for its final approval of the school's validation.
- The Verifier Team members will complete the CMA reimbursement form, if they wish, and send it to the Project Coordinator within 2 weeks of the On-site visit.

**Reader:** A Montessori credentialed educator with a minimum of three years of classroom experience at the level of classroom being validated will review the Classroom Questionnaire using the rubric appropriate to the level being evaluated. This will be returned to the Project Coordinator.

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

1. Reviewing the School 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 to be validated.
  3. Verify that all information provided by the school is accurate by observing the classroom, and reviewing all written documentation during an approximately 2-4 hour visit to the school. Both
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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.

5. Within 2 weeks, submit the reimbursement form to the Project Coordinator.

**Approval Committee:** This committee of 3 Montessori educators and/or administrators of schools make the final decision of Validation approval for a school. This committee oversees compliance with all requirements of a Validating Organization. Their responsibilities include:

1. Reviewing the Verifier Team's Report and Recommendations.
2. Determining a school's Validation status and giving final approval for the Certificate of Validation.
3. Overseeing all processes, records, and documentation of the CMA Validation Project.

**Validation Peer Coach:** A school wishing to become validated but not yet meeting 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 may meet all essential standards.

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 (AMI, AMS, IMC, MEPI) 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 a time frame for preparing the school to complete the Validation Project.

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