

Abstract

Project Title: Moore Montessori Community School, Start-Up and Implementation Grant

Project Director: Katherine Rucker, [REDACTED]

High-quality school options are urgently needed in our rural, educationally underserved North Carolina county, where many students still attend school in segregation-era school facilities (Summary of Moore County Facilities, 2017). Eighty percent of students in the southern part of the county are not career- or college-track-ready; and 60% are not reading at grade level in third, fourth, and fifth grades (NC School Report Cards, 2017). We believe this is unacceptable.

Moore Montessori Community School (“MMCS”) will be a vibrant learning community, where diverse students build strong academic foundations, executive function skills, and trust in their abilities, in preparation for lives of joy and purpose in the 21st century. Our goal is to provide educationally disadvantaged students with an excellent and equitable free Montessori education.

MMCS’s charter application was approved unanimously by the State Board of Education in June 2017. We are currently in our planning year. In August 2018, MMCS will open in West Southern Pines, NC, a “charter school desert area” (Thomas Fordham Institute, 2018). We will initially serve 90 students in kindergarten through second grade. Over the next four years, we will expand one grade per year to serve over 250 students in kindergarten through sixth grade.

We have strategically recruited families based on our target population, intended to reflect the true diversity of our community: 45% African American; 10% Hispanic; and 45% White, with goals of serving above 50% educationally disadvantaged students, including up to 50% economically disadvantaged students, 15% exceptional learners, and 10% English learners.

Our Montessori curriculum is a child-centered model that builds strong academic foundations through personalized, hands-on, mastery-based learning, while nurturing each child’s ebullient curiosity and human potential. Evidence-based studies show that students who attend Montessori schools have better academic outcomes, increased executive functioning and focus, and are kinder to their classmates. Additionally, Montessori is proving effective in closing the opportunity gap between economically disadvantaged students and their peers (Lillard et al., 2017).

With grant support, we will focus on the following four areas:

- **Strong Academic Foundations:** MMCS will establish authentic Montessori learning environments, in which students progress through a rigorous Montessori curriculum, aligned to state standards, to build strong academic foundations in numeracy and literacy.
- **Highly Effective Teachers:** MMCS will recruit, onboard, develop, and retain excellent Montessori-trained teachers who also reflect the diversity of the students we serve.
- **Support for Educationally Disadvantaged Students:** MMCS will identify and remove barriers that would keep educationally disadvantaged children and families from accessing high-quality Montessori education at our school.
- **Build Students’ Executive Functions:** MMCS will invest strategically in state-of-the-art tools, strategies, and supports to track and improve students’ executive function skills.