

Part I – Eligibility Certification

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school’s eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. All nominated public schools must meet the state’s performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
2. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2019 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
3. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.
4. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2013 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
5. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, or 2018.
6. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. If irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state, the U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school’s application and/or rescind a school’s award.
7. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as “persistently dangerous” within the last two years.
8. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
9. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
10. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district, as a whole, has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution’s equal protection clause.
11. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2018-2019) unless otherwise stated.

DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
 - 0 Middle/Junior high schools
 - 0 High schools
 - 0 K-12 schools
- 2 TOTAL

SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
 - Suburban
 - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2018 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
PreK	20	19	39
K	21	21	42
1	21	31	52
2	26	18	44
3	16	19	35
4	19	11	30
5	16	11	27
6	12	17	29
7	0	0	0
8	0	0	0
9	0	0	0
10	0	0	0
11	0	0	0
12 or higher	0	0	0
Total Students	151	147	298

*Schools that house PreK programs should count preschool students **only** if the school administration is responsible for the program.

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school (if unknown, estimate):
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
 - 0 % Asian
 - 3 % Black or African American
 - 9 % Hispanic or Latino
 - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - 88 % White
 - 0 % Two or more races
 - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2017 – 2018 school year: 5%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

Steps For Determining Mobility Rate	Answer
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	7
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2017 until the end of the 2017-2018 school year	9
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	16
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2017	310
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.05
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	5

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 1%
3 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):
Spanish

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 12%
Total number students who qualify: 35

8. Students receiving special education services: 10 %
31 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>3</u> Autism | <u>0</u> Multiple Disabilities |
| <u>0</u> Deafness | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness | <u>5</u> Other Health Impaired |
| <u>1</u> Developmental Delay | <u>10</u> Specific Learning Disability |
| <u>2</u> Emotional Disturbance | <u>15</u> Speech or Language Impairment |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 8
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	Number of Staff
Administrators	7
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	30
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	4
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	1
Student support personnel e.g., school counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	2

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 10:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

Required Information	2017-2018	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014
Daily student attendance	96%	96%	95%	95%	95%
High school graduation rate	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2018.

Post-Secondary Status	
Graduating class size	0
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	0%
Enrolled in a community college	0%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	0%
Joined the military or other public service	0%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school's mission or vision statement.

Montessori Education Centre is devoted to nurturing the whole child's growth and guiding the transformation of each student while modeling a love of learning.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

Montessori Education Centre (MEC) is delighted to open our doors to Arizona families who find themselves on our doorstep. We are a tuition-free public school. Any child who is qualified under the laws of Arizona for admission to a public school is qualified for admission to MEC. MEC was a founding entrant in the charter school movement in Arizona; Arizona charter schools are open to all children and are committed to serving a student body that reflects the local community. MEC enrolls all eligible children who submit a timely application, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. Charter schools may not limit admission based on ethnicity, national origin, gender, income level, disabling condition and proficiency in the English language or athletic ability. Charter schools may give enrollment preferences to certain pupils (e.g., returning students, siblings of pupils already enrolled in the charter school, children in foster care, homeless children, children of employees, and students within a certain age group or grade level).

The enrollment process at MEC begins in January for returning students. Returning families are given reenrollment forms to submit. Open enrollment occurs during the first full week in February. We announce open enrollment on our website and our street-side marquee, and the applications for admission are made available electronically and in the office.

If the number of applications exceeds the capacity of the program, class, grade level, or building, a lottery is held in the spring of that school year. After each program has placed students for all available spaces and parents are notified by mail, the lottery drawing is used to determine the order of a waiting list. Students that are on the waiting list receive a letter in the mail notifying them of their status. MEC continues to accept applications after open enrollment. The school's wait list is updated regularly, and parents of students placed on the wait list receive periodic communication as to their student's possible placement. These families also receive a new application for the next school year if they were unable to get a spot the previous year. If a student has been selected in the lottery, the parent/guardian of the student will receive an acceptance

notification via mail or by phone.

All families who accept an offer of enrollment must submit required enrollment documents within the timeframe given. These documents include: a copy of the student's birth certificate, proof of residency, and student immunization records.

Charter schools are an educational choice for an alternative, such as Montessori, to the traditional public educational system. Each charter school is different. In order to make an informed choice for their children's education, we want parents to be familiar with the Montessori method and understand the school's expectations of students and families. We want to ensure a good fit for the child in this setting and for parents to understand the critical role family plays in a student's success at our school. Prior to applying for enrollment, we ask that our prospective families familiarize themselves with the information we provide about Montessori and with the various programs at MEC (material that is on our website).

PART III – SUMMARY

Montessori Education Centre (MEC) has a vision of our school that is not simply one of an educational institution of bricks and mortar that is built and managed. Rather, we are a living, evolving entity whose faculty and staff think more organically. We develop programs and environments that lead toward more fully integrated and cohesive Montessori communities.

“The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.”

–Eleanor Roosevelt

When a dream is expressed and a desire heartfelt, doors open along the way. The seed was planted when Tammy Whiting, the Head of School for MEC, was researching for her degree in Early Childhood Education. She read a Masters thesis concerning children and their feelings during times of stress when they felt they had no control over their lives. She knew then it was her calling to create an environment that would enable children to feel that they could impact their lives, that what they did and felt mattered. She later attended a Montessori workshop and was impressed with Maria Montessori and her pedagogy. She walked away with a full heart and a desire to engage her dream while finally fueling the flames she kindled in college. She continued to build her knowledge of Maria Montessori and the Montessori philosophy and method. She spent numerous months observing Montessori schools. She shared her dream with her husband and two other like-minded couples. They believed, and continue to believe, in an environment where children would be treated with great respect and offered an opportunity to grow and learn at their own pace. They wanted to create an environment where all the senses and intelligences are involved in acquiring information. They wanted an environment where the teacher is a guide instead of the dispenser of information. Together, they purchased and renovated a property in Mesa, Arizona and started Montessori Children’s Centre, a private school. The dream was becoming a reality.

The school remained private for nine years. 1994 brought the Charter movement to Arizona. Mrs. Whiting decided to apply for a Charter; her desire was to expand her school to serve a more diverse population and greater number of children, especially families who would never be able to afford a private Montessori education. Montessori Education Centre received its Charter in 1996. The charter identifies the school as K-6 (with an option to expand grades). We currently serve children from many cities and townships in Arizona: Mesa, Tempe, Gilbert, Chandler, City of Maricopa, Queen Creek, Phoenix, Scottsdale, Apache Junction, and Gold Canyon. Maricopa County, in which Mesa is located, is one of the fastest growing counties in the nation, with a current population of over 4.3 million. The Mesa area, in which MEC is located, has become a magnet for a young, diverse, and highly educated workforce.

MEC programs are sustained and growth continues due to involving every part of our population, including students, staff, and constituents, in the process of expressing their aspirations for the school, building their awareness of its every aspect, and developing their own capacities. Growth is only sustainable because everyone involved is committed to providing an environment that encourages awareness and introspection to the point of perpetual learning. Giving people, both adults and children, access to tools and training enables them to not only develop their ability to make choices but also bestows upon them the power to make the most of those choices. Faculty, staff, parents, and students recognize their common stake in the success of the school and the wealth of learning to be gained from each other and for the children. Being this kind of steward involves more than talking together about improving the school; it requires reflecting, studying, rethinking, and reinventing. In addition, each step is taken and each idea is hatched in a context based on Maria Montessori’s methods and philosophy and our Mission Statement: “Montessori Education Centre is devoted to nurturing the whole child’s growth and guiding the transformation of each student while modeling a love of learning.”

The job of education is to develop great human beings who are valuable contributors to society. The Latin root of educate, “educare,” means to bring forth greatness. MEC is committed to helping every human with whom we come into contact to develop a strong sense of identity, a respect for humankind, and an insatiable hunger for truth, knowledge, and understanding.

MEC has gone through many changes through the years, not only with new students, faculty, staff, and physical facilities, but also with new ways of living our mission. It has become a living organism that has transformed itself through time and would be almost unrecognizable from the little school house of 1985 were it not for the continuous presence of the original dream.

PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

1. Core Curriculum:

1a. Reading/English language arts:

Our goal is for our language program to give children the ability to flush out concepts and the ability to communicate viewpoints with others in voice and in writing.

The Montessori language program complements the Arizona Academic Reading Readiness standards within the following subjects: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Montessori children begin learning letters by their sounds, not by the name of the letter. We use object boxes and sandpaper letters. Language learners move on to forming words with the “moveable alphabet” then form simple sentences. The child begins to write letters, words, sentences, and stories with proper letter formation. Once they can identify and decode simple words and read sentences, they start into phonetic readers followed by books selected for diversity and literacy value.

Once decoding becomes effortless, the focus changes to developing comprehension and inference skills. Teachers provide direct and explicit reading instruction through small group and one-on-one lessons, along with enough time for children to read books and practice the skills taught. As children read, teachers do one-on-one assessment and coaching. MEC uses a multitude of authentic assessments, but, for consistency throughout the grades, we supplement with *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures* from the Consortium on Reading Excellence in Education, approved by the Arizona Department of Education. We also use the Barton Reading System to help identify and address reading concerns, especially early-age dyslexia.

The writing curriculum is designed to complement the reading curriculum. Research and literature analysis are covered in depth. Organizing thoughts, writing effectively, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary are emphasized. Creative, expository, narrative, comparative, and argumentative writing, along with poetry, are taught with direct and explicit instruction. Arizona academic standards’ writing rubric is used to provide the framework for the writing process evaluation. We also use Triumph Learning Common Core Coach for ELA for assessment and as a practical life skill in test taking for both reading and writing.

1b. Mathematics:

The Montessori math curriculum complements the Arizona academic standards and focuses on operations and algebraic thinking, number and operations in base ten, measurement and data, and geometry. Math at MEC uses the senses to explore concepts and application. Children learn through their hands, working with materials, and using a variety of sensorial experiences to take in information and make connections. Maria Montessori believed that children should learn math in more ways than traditional memorization and repetition allowed. Our math curriculum consists of hands-on, sequential learning materials, one-on-one instruction, engaging math presentations, real-life application, all leading to deep levels of understanding. Children begin learning math concepts with concrete materials and gradually progress to abstract concepts. Advanced Montessori materials in fractions, decimals, geometry, and algebra are used to demonstrate progressively complex concepts and help children understand the process behind different algorithms as they progress through the curriculum. Students are challenged to develop their mathematical thinking through collaborative learning and group projects focused on problem solving. Knowledge is shared through presentations where students are able to explain and demonstrate process and concept. Children apply their knowledge to a variety of real life tasks such as graphing surveys, daily temperatures, cooking, building a garden, etc. These experiences contribute to an understanding of mathematical concepts through practical application.

MEC’s mathematical focus is about developing malleability and articulacy with numbers. We want children to identify patterns, develop number sense, think critically and logically, and offer solutions that others can try, discuss, and critique. We assess students using criterion-based tests (Triumph Learning Common Core Coach, Math), projects, presentations, peer instruction and review, and three-period lessons where teachers

present a lesson and have students name what they are learning (introduction), recognize what they are learning (identification), and remember what they have learned (cognition).

1c. Science:

MEC's goals related to science are for students to be curious about their world, to develop a keen sense of scientific observation and inquiry then investigation, and to develop a deep understanding that science is relevant to their lives and the world. Children should learn science through active involvement. MEC provides opportunities for children to be engaged both physically and mentally in examining and manipulating elements in their environment. We encourage students to ask questions, seek answers, conduct experiments, and collect data. Children soon realize that answers about the world can be discovered through their own explorations and analyses. Developing one's own ideas of the physical world adds range to learning. Teachers respond to children's discoveries and questions by extending or scaffolding their learning and posing different issues for them to explore. We give children the time, space, and materials to exercise their curiosity. Science is thus integrated into all curricular areas.

MEC views science also as an integral part of daily life in a Montessori classroom. Science occurs, on many occasions, in what the children are interested in or through the questions they ask. We encourage students to work together in building their ideas and discovering what works and why. We do not want science to be something that is taught strictly from a book. Children want to be scientists, not just consumers of science. We recognize that children innately desire to discover, experiment, and build their own theories. These "wants" shape our science curriculum. The Montessori science curriculum ranges broadly across life science, physical science, and Earth science.

The focus of assessing science concepts is not on the end product, but, instead, the focus is on the process of their scientific inquiry and investigation. Formative assessment considers the whole child development and makes evaluations based on observation of the child's progression and procedure. It is an ongoing activity monitoring every day to check for mastery and understanding.

1d. Social studies/history/civic learning and engagement

Maria Montessori called the study of culture Cosmic Education. She stated, "Cosmic Education is a path through which children develop a global vision." Each individual's "cosmic task" is to serve and protect humanity and the environment on which they are dependent.

Our social/civic/history curriculum is guided by the Five Great Lessons: The Beginning of the Universe and Earth, Life Comes to Earth, Humans Come to Earth, How Writing Begins, and How Numbers Began. These lessons are impressionistic stories that give children the "big picture" of the world and life. It is a way of presenting stories that open a plethora of topics then inquiries, which roughly correspond to traditional elementary academic subjects. Cosmic Education asks the children to start thinking about who they are as an individual, as part of a family, as part of a community, as part of the human species, as citizens of a nation and of the world.

Our younger students are exposed to a base of historical knowledge, to geographic features, and to the fundamental needs of man. They learn how to research, categorize, and integrate their knowledge, while building individual interests. The older students study history both sequentially and issue-driven, prehistory to current events. History is taught through multiple perspectives from credible sources. Students are given the opportunity to delve deeper into their cultural interests.

Cause and effect is a key element of our history program. We want to help students understand that people's choices and decisions can result in long-term and wide-reaching ramifications. It is also very important that we make history relevant to events that are happening in today's world, whether it affects them directly or indirectly. MEC believes it is essential that we help our students understand that their actions today can create change; hence, detrimental historical events can be avoided, and new challenges can be met with hope. History work is assessed through authentic assessments that include presentations, projects, reports, peer instruction and review, and observations.

1e. For secondary schools:

1f. For schools that offer preschool for three- and four-year old students:

Our primary environments with three and four year-olds are part of our private school, Montessori Children's Centre (MCC) and operate in conjunction with our charter school, MEC. These environments focus on children between the ages of three and six. The environment is divided into six main areas: practical life, sensorial, language, math, culture (history, geography, botany, zoology, physical science), and outdoor environment. A Montessori education is a spiral progression. Every lesson the child receives in their first year is built upon in the successive years, finishing out the kindergarten curriculum (which is aligned with the Arizona academic standards) in their last year. The primary environment at MEC provides children a strong foundation to begin their elementary career. When a child moves on from the primary level, he/she will have gained a stronger sense of self, decision-making abilities, a measurable amount of self-management, a sense of responsibility for others and their environment, and a strong academic foundation.

2. Other Curriculum Areas:

“Artists and poets are the raw nerve ends of humanity.” Art has a way of breathing life into a moment, and MEC believes strongly in the power of art. With a process-oriented arts program, MEC focuses on participation designed to open the minds and develop the imaginations of children; simultaneously, we furnish students with creative skills they need to function in the world at large. The process involves presenting a safe, uninhibited space in which they may learn to tap their vast creative potential. Arts at MEC invite children into unconditional and non-traditional exploration that allows them to realize talents beyond their preconceived limits. Each classroom uses art, whether visual, performing, musical, written, etc. and whether taught by a classroom teacher or specialty teacher, to enhance the well being of children by supporting, in subtle or overt ways, their academic and emotional health.

The arts are also used to teach acceptance and individuality, bolstering self-confidence through community support, all without fear of judgment. Creating anything, be it a dramatic interpretation, a song in a music video, a beautiful yet powerful expression on canvas, or just new-found poise as a public speaker, has the ability to make a spirit soar.

The Physical Education program at MEC gives attention to the following: sportsmanship and leadership, personal fitness level, development of competency in a variety of physical skills, acquisition of knowledge related to motor skills performance and playing sports and games (including rules and strategies).

The PE program is child-centered and follows the sequential progression of motor, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Children develop at various rates; therefore, lessons are flexible and designed to accommodate individual differences in a non-competitive nature. Lessons and instructional strategies are used to provide success-oriented experiences, yet students are challenged. Stimulating, open-ended activities help students gain confidence when attempting new learning experiences. Games, sports, and fitness activities are used for trial, error, and ultimate growth rather than contests. MEC's Physical Education program enhances a child's development not only in health/physical fitness and motor skills but also in academic performance, self-esteem, stress management, and social development. Through fun physical activities, children learn to appreciate the beauty of their bodies in motion.

MEC was one of twenty K-12 public schools throughout the U.S. selected by Youth Service America (YSA) to be a School of Impact. The YSA program is designed to support MEC's continuous efforts to improve student outcomes while strengthening our local communities through service learning.

YSA requires our community to create yearlong projects that exemplify what it means to be “A Good Neighbor” based on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Our students participate in real-world projects while learning academic content, and they practice civic engagement while addressing community needs. With teachers as their guides, our students take the lead in addressing critical community

challenges and their root causes. Our Year of Service overlays our existing curriculum, creating opportunities for authentic learning and practical application of the knowledge and skills taught in our classroom to make a true impact.

A garden raised by children naturally inspires discovery, learning, and adventure. The process of caring for plants, ponds, and soil allows children to practice being responsible for and nurturing other living things. It helps them lay the groundwork for an ethic of environmental stewardship. Gardening requires children to work together and cooperate in pursuit of a successful project. Lessons about respecting others' work and efforts emerge while working in the garden. Children learn to provide for themselves and others when crops are harvested from the soil, which is enriched with student-driven compost. These programs connect all children to the natural world and its cycles.

Students of all ages are welcome to experience MEC's Peace Garden throughout the day. Our full-time Master Gardener, who also engages the children in our school-wide composting program, facilitates activities in the garden. Composting has been a successful, useful, and mutually beneficial part of MEC's environmental efforts, as has recycling, upcycling (especially in art projects), and conserving.

Maria Montessori would agree with the movement to get kids outdoors considering she placed such a great emphasis on having children experience nature and nature education. She felt that the Outdoor Environment should be an extension of the classroom. The Outdoor Environment teacher extends classroom lessons and student interests. Activities still require care for materials, cooperation with peers, and completion of tasks.

3. Special Populations:

MEC provides for all students, including the exceptional and those with special needs. In addition to the prepared environment, which has proven successful for these students, MEC contracts with a certified Special Education teacher, a speech therapist, and an occupational therapist. They provide services to students who qualify with an Individual Educational Plan. Yet, MEC provides opportunities in our classrooms to students with special needs on an inclusive basis. Inclusion in our Montessori environment has allowed these children to thrive as far as their desires and exceptional traits will take them.

The Montessori method of education provides a nurturing, supportive environment for children of all abilities and learning styles, including children with special needs. Children learn in multi-age classes, with the same teacher, for three years. This continued connection provides stability and predictability for the child and adult. The students can focus on their learning without having to worry about transitioning to new environments, instruction styles, and personalities. Teachers also establish a deep partnership with parents that aid in the experience of the child. While MEC does not have an established Gifted Program, our environment inherently provides appropriate challenges and stimulates children of above-average achievement and select abilities. This innate nurturing is achieved with rich curriculum and emphasis on critical, independent thinking and study. The student is encouraged to extend far past what is required and is given the freedom and resources to do so.

MEC recognizes that children learn differently and at their own pace. We respect each child's unique learning path. We create a student's educational plan to match their unique developmental level, learning style, and even interests. Learning in a Montessori classroom is multi-sensory and hands-on. We allow students to move freely, especially those who require a high level of physical activity or may have difficulty sustaining attention. We help students develop organizational and time management skills that lead to independence, which is especially important for students with executive functioning deficits. Our Montessori teachers are trained observers who expertly individualize instruction for all students. Through careful consideration of each student, lesson plans include accommodations and interventions for students who need support.

Montessori Education Centre requires our teachers to attend training from our Special Education director every year. Teachers learn the legal aspects of special needs education in the United States. They are trained on how to gather information on children, how to prepare documentation for a Child Study report, and/or what information is necessary for an Individual Educational Plan (IEP). Teachers and assistants are trained

on early identification and interventions and accommodations. They are coached on the implications of exceptionality and other risk factors of the young child and how to aid the child's development regardless of these factors. Our Special Education director and speech and occupational therapists are available to all MEC classrooms for advisement and coaching.

Throughout the years, a wide range of students with special needs have graced the school, including gifted children, those with emotional disabilities, mild mental delay, Asperger's Syndrome, Autism, Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, specific learning disabilities in math and language, physical disabilities, and speech and language impairments. It has been noted and established that these students add to the fabric of our community in a unique and exceptional way.

PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

1. School Climate/Culture:

When one crosses the immense stretch of the deserts of Arizona, if one was hunting, searching those very deserts, attempting to quench a thirst for authentic Montessori education, our hope is that all one would need to do is find a path that leads the way to Montessori Education Centre. Our desire is to be an oasis, a fertile spot in the desert where children and families can find a place to nourish their souls and bloom strong. We reside in the Valley of the Sun and indeed provide warmth. It radiates throughout our community, touching all who enter MEC.

It begins with Grace and Courtesy, a Montessori term used to reflect the way in which we endeavor to engage in all our interactions: with ourselves, with others, and with the environment in which we live. Grace and Courtesy are not taught so much as modeled, and practiced, at every level of our work and play. MEC's children experience how community can be an extended family, through supportive relationships with individuals and groups both in and out of the classroom, and they apply that understanding to the global community. Grace and Courtesy produce a tremendous vision, one we work towards every day in our own hearts and behaviors. Because of this commitment, individuals have a breadth of respect for each other on our campus.

MEC classrooms are designed to be child-centered, striving to offer each student an individualized experience, which fosters the whole child and nurtures a life-long desire to learn. Emphasis is placed on freedom (with structure and order), reality and nature, beauty and atmosphere, as well as community development. We offer a living environment that truly "follows each child" by utilizing multi-sensory experiences that respect the individual learner and his/her balance of intelligences.

Along with the students, the faculty and staff are highly respected. Administration recognizes the value of employees and understands how important and far reaching their work is. Teachers are essential to the big conversations; their experience and expertise weigh heavily on community-wide decisions. Much like our children, teachers are allowed freedom within structure and order to create environments that best serve the child. They are guardians and guide students down the child's own path in her/his time while providing opportunities for growth of the whole child based on individual needs. Teachers are the animating spirit of the classroom, serving as a dynamic link between the child and, essentially, the world.

2. Engaging Families and Community:

We at MEC understand that we serve the whole family when we have a child in our care. The parent-child relationship is sacred, and the love they share is enough of an impetus for us to always be understanding. Because of this factor, our interactions with parents must come from a place of love, compassion, and support. Maria Montessori's view on educating a child relies heavily on the triangle formed by the child, the parent, and the teacher. We invite parents and extended family to help in the classrooms with special projects, reading to students, field trips, school-wide events, and service learning projects. They are invited to four parent nights throughout the year for parent education and/or student presentations. Parent-student-teacher conferences are held near the end of each semester.

MEC activity seeks interaction with the wider community. Maria Montessori believed that education should include the development of social responsibility. Service is woven throughout our curriculum, starting in our classroom communities with student mentors, care of gardens/composting, and recycling. We also have longstanding service traditions that include partnering with Children First Academy (CFA), a local school for the homeless. Its students come to our campus yearly and participate in "Mercado." Our elementary students create businesses and sell items or provide services for imitation dollars. In conjunction with this event, the school community collects much-needed items for the students from CFA to take with them after their visit. MEC students also visit local nursing homes annually. In May, we have a school-wide food drive for St. Mary's Food Bank.

The school also encourages children to become involved in the global community, whether collecting annually for UNICEF (and learning how the money is used) or raising money for the Red Cross and Salvation Army at times of national and world disasters. They participate in an organized gathering of care packages for combat troops and help organize food for Feed My Starving Children. Students may also be seen walking barefoot around campus in support of “One Day Without Shoes” to raise awareness of those dealing with issues surrounding unshod feet.

MEC has been involved in projects focused on hunger and water issues, with a particular concentration on children. We organized a community-wide water walk that generated thousands of pounds of bottled water for local needs and raised thousands of dollars for Save the Rain and their work in Tanzania. We have continuously had school-wide service projects for both MLK Day of Service and Global Youth Service Day.

3. Professional Development:

It is not only important for us to model a love of learning within the walls of our community but to also seek external mentors and opportunities to help us grow as educators, as learners, and as humans. Professional development is encouraged and supported at MEC. Whether seeking expertise on how to implement something new or needing support on a particular issue, workshops, webinars, or training can be absolutely invaluable. Getting a fresh perspective from someone outside our community can make all the difference.

Similar to the Montessori philosophy regarding children, professional development also needs to be selected based on the individual needs of a teacher, the needs (by proxy) of the students, and/or the community needs as a whole. In short, we try to participate in professional development in ways that reflect our Montessori teaching practices. Teachers, for the most part, are active learners who take an interest in developing and refining their skills in the classroom. They do not struggle learning new information; they struggle with implementing it into their classroom. In order for professional development to be effective, we embrace this challenge and tailor our discussions to meet teachers where they are, no matter the stage of their careers.

By respecting the teachers and staff and considering their career stages, we are able to suggest professional development that is relevant to them and that will help them be successful in their own Montessori classrooms. They need to be given the opportunity to gather the tools that would be most beneficial to them. Through ongoing discussion and reflection, teachers and administration discuss what opportunities would be most beneficial to the teacher, which, in turn, will be beneficial to the student. The discussion also includes professional development opportunities that would support school-wide initiatives aimed at achieving something collectively or addressing a collective concern.

Our professional development opportunities most often fall into these categories: workshops/webinars, school visits, coaching, research, and peer observation. The Montessori community has a plethora of workshops and webinars at our teachers’ disposal. These are offered through national and local organizations, such as American Montessori Society, Montessori Foundation, North America Montessori Centre, The Association Montessori Internationale, and North American Montessori Teacher Association. Our teachers also participate in opportunities from two local Montessori training programs, Southwest Institute of Montessori Studies and Arizona’s Center for Montessori Teacher Education. MEC staff has also engaged in professional development opportunities provided by the Arizona Department of Education.

4. School Leadership:

With the active guidance and involved support of the leadership team (head of school and principal), each member of the MEC family is continually striving to understand, anticipate, and fulfill the needs of our students. All members of the staff community are trained specifically and thoroughly to respond to the academic, social, emotional, spiritual, and developmental needs of the child.

MEC. Loyalty to the child initiates and leads the way; our leadership team follows. Leadership at MEC practices an awareness of its responsibility to model integrity, respect, and accountability in all that it does. There is a clear purpose and a deep desire to create and contribute.

Leadership recognizes the importance of an enriching community. Teachers are empowered to use their keen observation skills, experience, and expertise to facilitate a match between the unique individual learner and available knowledge. Most importantly, leadership is willing to have courageous conversations when needed, open and honest conversations about both the teachers' strengths and any recommendations for growth. Leadership understands the importance of feedback and recognizes it as a function of respect. Faculty and staff know their contributions are recognized, appreciated, and carefully considered. Although there are formal and informal evaluations, our leaders check in and consult with the staff on a regular basis, keeping the lines of communication open. Any concerns or issues with students, teachers, or parents are addressed immediately, effectively, and courageously.

MEC leadership understands the importance of including everyone in the exchange, encouraging dialogue and discussion. It is through this collaborative spirit that teachers feel respected, valued, heard, and considered in school-wide decisions. They are given the autonomy to use their strengths and unique skills to create successful environments for their students. It is within this freedom and trust that teachers are their most authentic and comfortable, which translates to students' trust and authenticity, ultimately creating universal growth.

MEC believes that everyone, from our youngest student to our Head of School, has something to offer our community and our world. Instead of the typical flow chart to illustrate management organization, we use a graphic of floating bubbles that move and change with the compulsory breeze; no one is on top and no one is at the bottom. At times, one may lead, and, at other times, may follow. This flexibility has created a community where people can be themselves, try new things, be vulnerable, make mistakes, and dream big.

Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Being at MEC means participating in values-based leadership, one of our most grounding aspirations. Working toward values-based leadership involves the following continuous self-improvement process: basing our approach to success in Montessori values; considering how Montessori values should shape our behavior, actions, and communications; reflecting on whether or not we are in alignment with Montessori values on a day-to-day basis. MEC's goal is for these Montessori values to be evident in everything we do and say. This permeation is how we serve the child.

To build healthy, thriving communities steeped deeply in Montessori belief, it is imperative to build the container that will have the space to hold the light of the child and their educators. This building process starts with the school's leadership. School leaders must have the ability to identify and reflect on what the community is to stand for, what its values are, and what matters most. All involved must be willing to constantly assess whether or not every aspect of the community is truly "living Montessori." A great part of this assessment is based on leadership consistently considering all outlooks and opinions with an open mind, which can enhance the capacity within our community to see situations from multiple perspectives and divergent viewpoints, thus gaining a fuller understanding.

One of the most essential components to our community is our ability and willingness to put effort into developing healthy relationships with our students, our colleagues, and the parents. This process happens when we commit to courageous conversation.

Engaging in courageous conversation is incomparable in its impact over whether or not we can affect deep and lasting improvement and, as part of that process, build a school-wide culture of trust and respect. In turn, our community becomes a place in which change and improvement, however challenging the path to their achievement, are welcomed and embedded in daily practice.

MEC is a community where the expression of honest concerns is expected, required, and desired by everyone involved, in order to support a collaborative spirit while protecting the light of all. It is the self-inculcation of Montessori values into our life, our spirit, our natural way of being that, in time, has made beacons of our faculty and staff that others seek to follow. MEC is a sacred space where the light of an individual is honored, nurtured, and protected. And, because of this focus, our children are free to bloom strong and succeed not only academically, but, more importantly, emotionally and spiritually.

We appreciate the opportunity to share the heart of our school, it's people and philosophy, in consideration for this prestigious honor.