

2024-2025 ANNUAL REPORT

*Where
Transformation
Takes Root*



THE Montessori School
of Englewood

A Chicago Public
Charter School



RITA NOLAN

Executive Director
The Montessori Network

Dear Friends,

In this moment of reflection, I find myself both humbled and inspired by what we have built—together. This past year, The Montessori Network served over 425 children and their families across our three core programs: The Montessori School of Englewood, our Head Start Early Childhood Center, and the Montessori Residency of Chicago. These aren't just numbers. They are stories—of joy, of progress, of transformation—that unfold every day in our classrooms and ripple through the community. At the heart of our work is a simple, radical belief: every child, regardless of income or zip code, deserves access to a high-quality Montessori education. You help make that belief a reality. Because of your generosity, our students, 98% of whom come from low-income households, are engaged in hands-on, inquiry-based learning that cultivates academic excellence, compassion, independence, and leadership. We took bold steps to reinvigorate Montessori practice in our early childhood classrooms, ensuring even our youngest learners are supported by research-based, developmentally appropriate pedagogy. The Montessori Residency of Chicago expanded its reach, training and mentoring aspiring educators deeply committed to equity and excellence in underserved communities. We also navigated complex transitions, including new oversight structures for our Head Start program and the beginning stages of a charter renewal process for The Montessori School of Englewood. While challenging, these milestones only affirmed the strength and resilience of our team and our mission. In many ways, this year was about laying foundations for a more sustainable financial model, long-term leadership succession, and deeper programmatic alignment across our network. Your investment is helping us meet today's needs—it is helping us shape the future of public Montessori education. We are clear-eyed and full of resolve as we look to the road ahead. We know what's at stake. And we know we can't do it alone. On behalf of our students, families, faculty, and staff: thank you. Thank you for believing in our work, for walking beside us, and for making this vision possible.

With deepest appreciation,

Rita Nolan

Executive Director
The Montessori Network



STEPHANIE TOON

Principal
The Montessori School of
Englewood

Dear Friends,

As I complete my first year as Principal of The Montessori School of Englewood, I am honored to reflect on our progress together. This past school year has been a transformative chapter in our journey—one marked by deepening our roots in authentic Montessori practice while embracing the unique responsibilities of serving a public school community in Englewood. Our school theme this year centered on diversified leadership, collective efficacy, and building strong teams. These priorities were not just aspirational—they guided every decision and structure we refined. We focused on cultivating leadership at all levels, recognizing that sustainable school improvement depends on distributed responsibility and shared ownership. Our teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and support staff rose to the occasion, contributing meaningfully to school-wide initiatives and fostering a sense of collective purpose. In professional development and daily practice, we emphasized collaboration and trust. Through data-informed team meetings, cross-functional leadership groups, and shared problem-solving protocols, we built a culture where staff began to feel empowered to lead and supported to grow. The results were evident in the confidence with which our teams approached instructional challenges and student support. This year also reaffirmed the power of Montessori education in a public, urban setting. We remained committed to meeting each child where they are—academically, socially, and emotionally—and worked to ensure that every classroom environment reflected this commitment. We expanded our support for diverse learners and deepened our partnerships with families, anchoring our work in equity and authenticity. The work we do is not easy, but it is meaningful, urgent, and transformative. As we look ahead to the coming year, I am excited to continue building on this foundation—with a clear focus on student achievement, adult learning, and community connection.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Toon'.

Stephanie Toon

Principal
The Montessori School of Englewood

Montessori School of Englewood

A Journey of Equity, Empowerment, and Excellence

"We believe in every child, every family, and every future."

A Vision Takes Root (2010–2012)

In the heart of Chicago's South Side, in a community too often overlooked by systemic institutions, one visionary educator—Rita Nolan—envisioned something radical: a free, public Montessori school serving the children of Englewood. At a time when most Montessori schools were private and inaccessible to low-income families, the Montessori School of Englewood (MSE) was created to challenge that norm. It began with a simple but revolutionary belief: children in underserved communities deserve access to the same empowering, child-centered education offered in more affluent areas. The school opened its doors with just a few classrooms, a handful of passionate teachers, and a mission that would soon ripple across the city.



Growing Roots and Building Trust (2013–2016)

As the school expanded to serve more grades, families and community members began to take notice. MSE wasn't just teaching reading and math but nurturing curiosity, independence, and peace education. Students learned how to care for themselves, each other, and their environment. The results were tangible. Discipline referrals decreased, while engagement and attendance soared. Parents became partners in their children's education. MSE wasn't just a school—it was becoming a pillar of community hope.

Head Start, Big Futures (2017)

In 2017, MSE took a groundbreaking step by partnering with Start Early to launch a Montessori-based Head Start program—one of the few in the country operating in a public school setting. This program wasn't just about early learning. It was about early empowerment. Children as young as three learned to pour their own juice, speak respectfully to peers, and engage in hands-on activities that laid the foundation for math, language, and executive functioning skills. Families received wraparound services, including health screenings, mental health support, and parenting workshops. For many, it was their first experience of feeling seen and supported in a school setting.

The Residency Program: Planting Educators in the Community (2018)

To address the shortage of Montessori-trained teachers—especially teachers of color—MSE created an Urban Teacher Residency Program in 2018. In partnership with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector and Loyola University Chicago, MSE began training future educators right in its own classrooms. The program was unique: residents were paid, mentored, and received real-time classroom experience while earning their certification. Importantly, the program recruited from the community, ensuring that students would see teachers who looked like them, understood their stories, and believed in their potential. Graduates of the residency program now teach at MSE and across Chicago, spreading a new model for equity-driven Montessori education.

Resilience in Crisis: The COVID-19 Years (2020–2022)

When the pandemic hit, Englewood—like many historically marginalized communities—was disproportionately impacted. MSE did not retreat. It rose. Teachers delivered Montessori learning kits to students' homes. Staff made weekly phone calls to check on families. Meals, laptops, and emotional support were distributed with the same care and intention as classroom lessons. Even in remote learning, MSE preserved what made it special: independence, self-paced learning, and deep trust in students' capacity to thrive.

Today: A Model of Urban Montessori Excellence (2023–2025)

Today, the Montessori School of Englewood is a beacon of possibility. It serves hundreds of children across multiple grades with an integrated Montessori continuum from Head Start through upper elementary. Students leave MSE with academic strength and the ability to lead with empathy, solve problems confidently, and imagine a future beyond their zip code. The school's Residency Program trains the next generation of culturally responsive educators. Its Head Start program continues to be a model for early education. And its leadership is paving the way for Montessori secondary programs and deeper community integration.

Impact Highlights

100%

MSE Head Start students receive developmental screenings, health support, and social-emotional enrichment

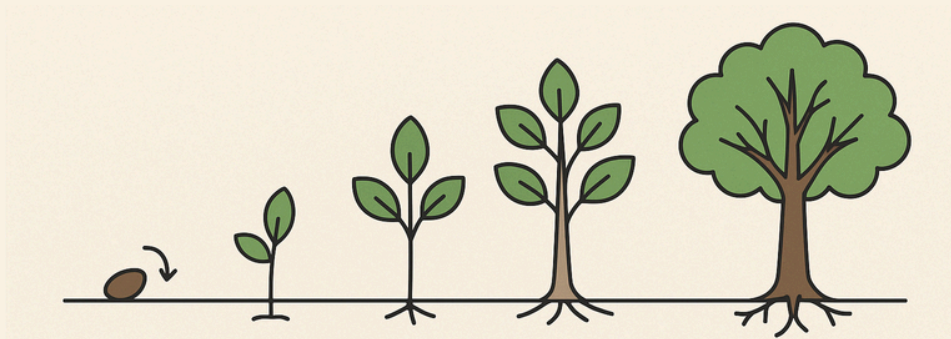
90%

Retention rate in public Montessori classrooms

TMSOE is a leader in anti-bias, anti-racist Montessori pedagogy, shaping national conversations on educational equity.

A Final Word: Education as Liberation

The Montessori School of Englewood isn't just a school. It is a movement that says every child, regardless of income or background, deserves a prepared environment, freedom to grow, and guides who believe in them. Its legacy is not just in test scores or program grants—it's in the confident child who leads a classroom discussion, the parent who finally feels heard, and the teacher who came back to serve her own neighborhood.



Our Students

Demographics



12.30%

English Language Learners



16.20%

Students with Disabilities



19.80%

Students in Transitional Living

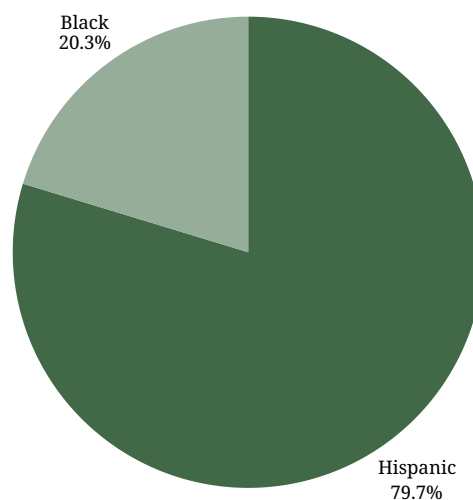


97.30%

Low Income



Sub Group Demographics SY 24/25

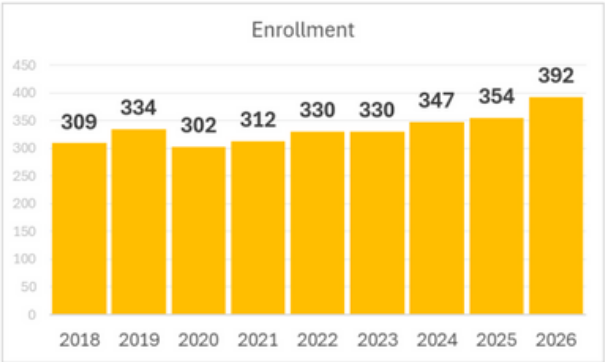
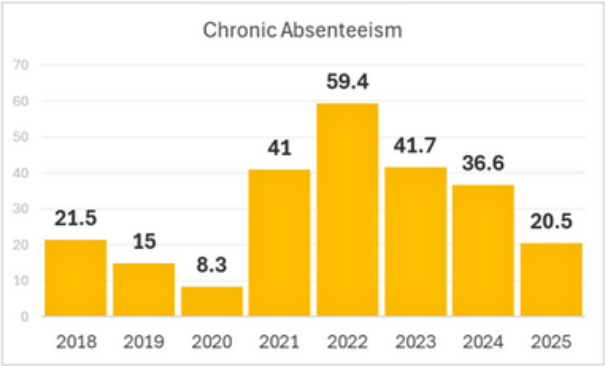


Montessori: An Education for Life, Not for Test Scores

At The Montessori School of Englewood (TMSOE), we believe that education should not be limited to preparing students for standardized tests. Instead, our mission is to prepare children for life—to nurture independent thinkers, compassionate leaders, and curious learners who can thrive in a complex world. The Montessori approach equips students with lifelong skills: critical thinking, self-discipline, problem solving, and a deep sense of agency. These outcomes can't be fully captured by a test score—but they are clearly visible in the real-world success of our students.

Rising Attendance, Strengthened Community

Three years ago, chronic absenteeism posed a major challenge. Today, we are proud to share a significant reduction in chronic absenteeism, reflecting deeper student engagement and stronger family partnerships. (See Graph X.) This improvement stems directly from Montessori principles: classrooms that cultivate a sense of belonging, individualized learning that honors each child's pace, and purposeful work that inspires curiosity and intrinsic motivation. When students feel seen, valued, and inspired, they come to school. Every day.

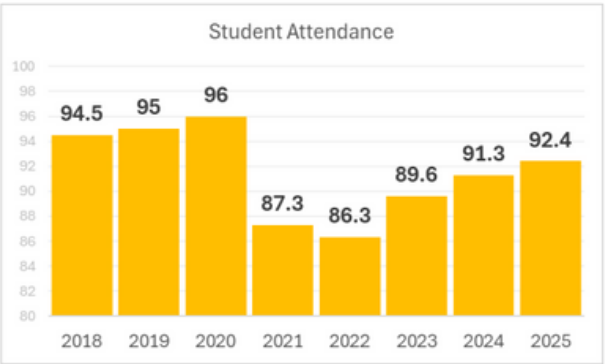


Enrollment Growth and Family Trust

Families are choosing Montessori education in increasing numbers. This year, TMSOE welcomed 50 additional students, a clear vote of confidence in our mission and impact. (See Graph XX.) This growth reflects more than rising enrollment—it reflects trust. Families recognize that Montessori education fosters learners who are eager, independent, and deeply engaged. Our classrooms are places where students lead conversations, collaborate authentically, and develop the skills to navigate their world.

Consistent Attendance, Long-Term Success

Over the past three years, overall attendance has steadily increased, laying a stronger foundation for both academic and personal development. Students who regularly experience Montessori's prepared environment build critical executive functioning skills and resilience. This strong foundation leads to remarkable outcomes. Each year, TMSOE graduates are accepted into selective programs and selective enrollment high schools throughout Chicago. They enter those schools as self-directed learners with the confidence, focus, and intellectual curiosity to thrive.



The Secret Sauce: Education Rooted in Humanity

The “secret sauce” of Montessori isn’t a single program or intervention — it’s a philosophy that places the child at the center of the learning experience:



Community & Connection: Teaching collaboration, empathy, and grace.



Child-Centered Learning: Honoring individual pace and interests.



Intrinsic Motivation: Inspiring curiosity, not compliance



Independence & Agency: Building skills for self-management and decision-making.

**“Free the child’s potential,
and you will transform
him into the world.”**

Maria Montessori

At TMSOE, we aren’t preparing students to pass a test. We are preparing them to lead, innovate, and contribute to their communities and beyond.

Jode Redding: Lindblom Math & Science Academy Graduate

Jode Redding’s story is one of perseverance, excellence, and promise. A graduate of Lindblom Math and Science Academy, Jode earned a full scholarship to Smith College, where she is continuing her academic journey as a leader and changemaker.

At Lindblom, Jode was a proud member of the Million Dollar Club, an elite recognition awarded to students who collectively secure over one million dollars in scholarship offers. This accomplishment speaks to her determination and the community of support and opportunity that helped make her dreams a reality.

Her success powerfully reminds us why we remain committed to creating pathways that prepare students to thrive in college, career, and life.



**“I am grateful for the
support and opportunities
that pushed me to aim
higher and believe in
what's possible.”**
– Jode Redding.

Student Spotlight: Leah White

Class of 2025 Valedictorian

Our 2025 Valedictorian, Leah White, is a shining example of academic excellence and leadership. Her hard work, determination, and commitment to learning have earned her acceptance to Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, one of Chicago's most prestigious selective-enrollment schools.

Leah's success reflects her perseverance and the supportive Community that nurtured her talents and fueled her aspirations. As she prepares to take the next step in her journey, Leah is a role model for her peers and an inspiration for future graduates



**“Being named
Valedictorian shows me
what's possible when
you set high goals and
never give up.”
– Leah White.**

Graduate High School Acceptances

- Simeon Career Academy
- Mother McAuley
- Gary Comer College Prep
- Catalyst Maria High School
- Richards Career Academy
- CICS Ralph Ellison Academy
- Rauner College Prep
- Kenwood Academy High School
- Bogan Computer Technical High School
- Lindblom Math & Science Academy
- Chicago Bulls College Prep
- Gage Park High School
- King College Prep High School
- Chicago Tech Academy High School
- Whitney Young Magnet High School
- Butler College Prep
- Kenwood Academy High School
- Gwendolyn Brooks College Prep Academy
- Mansueto High School
- Horizon Science Academic
- Johnson College Prep
- St. Rita of Cascia High School
- The Noble Academy

The Universal Child

I am reminded of the many changes in my childhood, coming to a country as an adopted child at age four, not knowing anyone, or why I was on a plane, never having seen that monstrous machine with giant wings. I flew into St. Paul, MN, in a winter storm, seeing snow for the first time. My new family offered ways to experience this new environment, letting me play in the brand new snow, putting me in a snowsuit, preparing me. I had never been in a blizzard before. I was thrilled to play for hours, repeatedly sliding down the back stairs joyfully. My new family could not believe I was so happy after such a dramatic change from the Andes Mountains of the Urubamba region of Cusco, Peru, to a winter storm of several feet in my new home.



Many children experience similar uncertainty, dramatic changes, joy, and comfort. What does a child seek when they are brought into an unfamiliar environment? How do they engage with what is in front of them? Who do they look for, and what is their motive to explore and discover? The Universal Child begins to answer these questions through their actions; they begin the adventure of life.

In her wisdom, Dr. Montessori studied and observed children in various environments, from the slums of Italy to the streets of Calcutta, to the shores of the first Montessori school in the United States. She spoke about the Universal Child and how most children go through similar developmental stages, each possessing an innate energy that we must aid in developing. She was also one of the few who demonstrated that early childhood was/is the right moment to begin the path of independence, the path of self-actualization, and the path of knowledge, and to harness freedoms and self-discipline in a discovery setting. These are foundational steps to their development.

A Montessori environment allows each child to develop at their own pace and energy. It is a place of exploration to discover the world around them, to practice many of life's practical habits that are ingrained for the rest of their lives. A Montessori environment is a preparation for life, a preparation for new knowledge to discover and a preparation for social engagement. Dr. Montessori spoke about the altruism of the "no man is an island". She clearly noted that one human cannot accomplish what has been achieved for thousands of years. It takes all of us in cooperation with each other to achieve greatness.



Our Montessori environment is filled with these endeavors. They are incubators for greatness. These are foundational as the beginning stages for children to follow. The formation of their character will begin to thrive in an environment steeped with discovery, potential, and joy in their work, where one can clearly observe those "aha moments."

My parents were early pioneers in Montessori education, creating a new school for children to thrive in Minnesota. Having gone through the Montessori experience at an early age, I am following in their footsteps. My wish is for EVERY child to experience a Montessori education so that they can be prepared for life's adventures.

Early Childhood Coach
Juan St. Mane

Beyond the Classroom Highlights

UIC Gardeners- School Garden

For the past eight years, University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener Rosemary Wyche has been a cornerstone of The Montessori School of Englewood garden since 2019. Rosemary's dedication has transformed our garden into a vibrant learning space and continues to inspire our students and community. Because of her dedication, our students experience the joy of planting, tending, and harvesting fresh food while learning valuable lessons about sustainability, health, and community care. Rosemary's steady presence has grown our garden and cultivated a sense of pride and stewardship among our students.





After School Partnerships

TMSOE has the honor and privilege of expanding opportunities for its students by nurturing long-standing partnerships while also cultivating new experiences with new collaborators

We are so grateful to continue our partnership with Joffrey Ballet. Along with afterschool classes, they offered two of our lower elementary students, Kennedy Green and Genesis Inga, an opportunity to participate in their Bridge Program, a free dance program on Saturdays that introduces students to the basic elements of ballet. Our students are also qualified to participate in the Bridge Summer Intensive Program, which can lead to a full scholarship to the Grainer Academy of the Joffrey Ballet.



Next Wave Stem

One of our new partners, provided free Robotics classes (K-3rd and 4th-8th grade). Along with complimentary classes, they offered curricula and stipends for our teachers who were instructors. Our students built robots from scratch and learned how to code them. Thank you Next Wave STEM for bringing hands-on applications of science to Englewood.

Depave

Our forthcoming green schoolyard (created in partnership with Depave Chicago and Depave-Portland) pushed forward in four areas this past year.

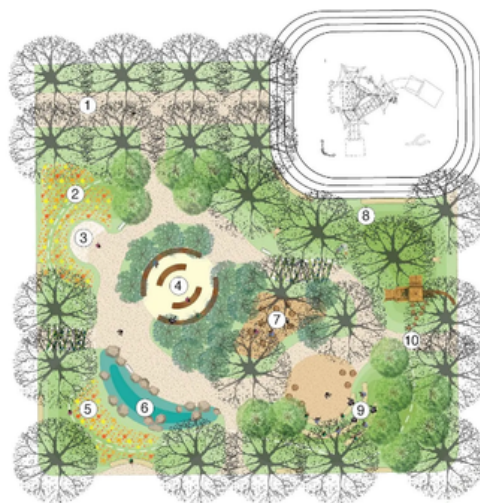


Current TMSOE Playground

1. **CPS APPROVAL:** We successfully achieved a positive review and approval with CPS for the design and engineering of the 12,500-SF green schoolyard project. This is no small feat, as our project pushes the envelope for green schoolyard design on CPS property. Professional consultants Indigo Ecological Design (landscape architecture) and Geosyntec (civil engineer) completed the construction drawings and specifications, and after careful review with CPS, TMSOE was given the green light in December to proceed into bidding.
2. **FUNDING:** During this time, our team has ramped up its fundraising efforts and applied for numerous grants and funding opportunities but without success thus far. The elimination of federal funding for climate and community infrastructure projects has certainly been part of our challenge. We are shifting our strategy to focus on corporate and private philanthropic sources of funding going forward. We will also be seeking support within our TMSOE networks and friends for financial support of the project.
3. **2026 DEPAVE SUMMIT:** During this time, Depave Chicago and Depave (Portland) expanded the programming for the TMSOE Depave Event (tentatively planned for summer 2026) to include a weeklong series of environmental educational activities, inviting community-based depave organizations around the country to convene, participate and learn about depaving together. The planning of the summit expands TMSOE's project into a national hub for community transformation design. We'll be posting more about this momentous gathering later in the year.

4. DOCUMENTARY FILM:

We also welcomed Andrew Meriweather, a documentary filmmaker, to the partner team. Andrew contacted Depave Chicago with interest in the ways that Chicago is beating flooding issues across the city, including green infrastructure. His interest in flooding led him to Depave Chicago which led him to us and our project. Andrew has taken great interest in our mission at TMSOE, and we're delighted that TMSOE will be part of his documentary about environmentally transformative spaces and places for children and communities.



1. Garden entry
2. Eco-discovery pathways
3. Memorial garden
4. Outdoor classroom
5. Butterfly/habitat gardens
6. Biology rain-garden
7. Shady picnic grove, seating area
8. Playmounds with trees & play logs
9. Stone seating, mini-amphitheater
10. Shaded accessible pathway



Design for future TMSOE Nature Playground

Montessori Residency Chicago

Preparing the Next Generation of Educators

The Montessori Residency Chicago (MRC), founded in 2017 out of The Montessori School of Englewood, continues to shine as a leading urban teacher education program. Built on the belief that excellent teaching transforms communities, MRC prepares confident, credentialed, and culturally responsive educators ready to guide children in public Montessori classrooms.

Our two-year residency blends rigorous coursework with reflective coaching, creating a transformative experience for adult learners. Residents gain a deep understanding of Montessori philosophy, hands-on expertise with classroom materials, and—perhaps most importantly—a commitment to teaching through a culturally responsive lens. By the time they graduate, MRC educators know the what, the why, and the how of Montessori, equipped to meet the developmental needs of every child.



Celebrating Our Graduates

In 2024, six new teachers completed their credentials through MRC - four at TMSOE.

Congratulations to:

Ashley Matthews & Brittni Craft
Elementary I Credential

McCall Long & Ethel Nelson
Early Childhood Credential

Their achievement reflects their dedication and the strength of MRC's model:
investing in adult learners through meaningful coursework, coaching, and mentorship.



Commitment to Excellence

This past year, MRC continued to advance its standing among accrediting bodies:

- We remain in good standing with the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE).
- We submitted our application for affiliation with the American Montessori Society (AMS), one of the most rigorous Montessori accrediting organizations.
- We entered our first renewal cycle with the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) for our Elementary program, with Early Childhood soon to follow.

These milestones demonstrate our unwavering commitment to delivering a high-quality, nationally recognized teacher education program.

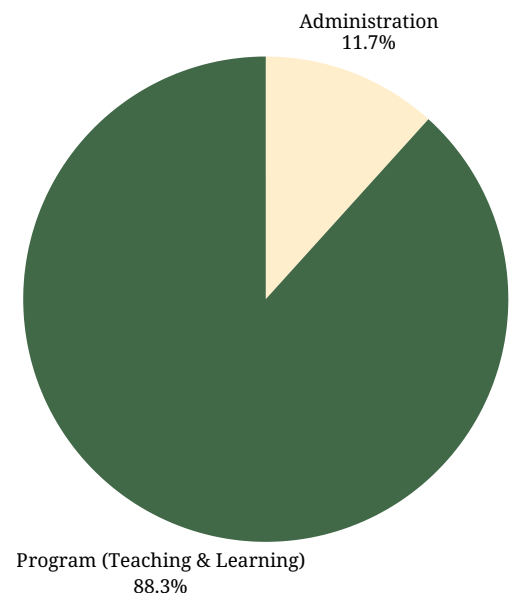
Looking Ahead!

Each summer, MRC welcomes new Residents at the Elementary and Early Childhood levels, building a pipeline of passionate educators grounded in Montessori philosophy and practice. Our credentialed instructors—many still active in classrooms at TMSOE—bring decades of combined experience and remain deeply invested in our mission. As we look forward, we remain inspired by our graduates. Their dedication to children, families, and communities exemplifies the heart of our Mission: **breaking barriers and shaping the next generation of change-makers.**

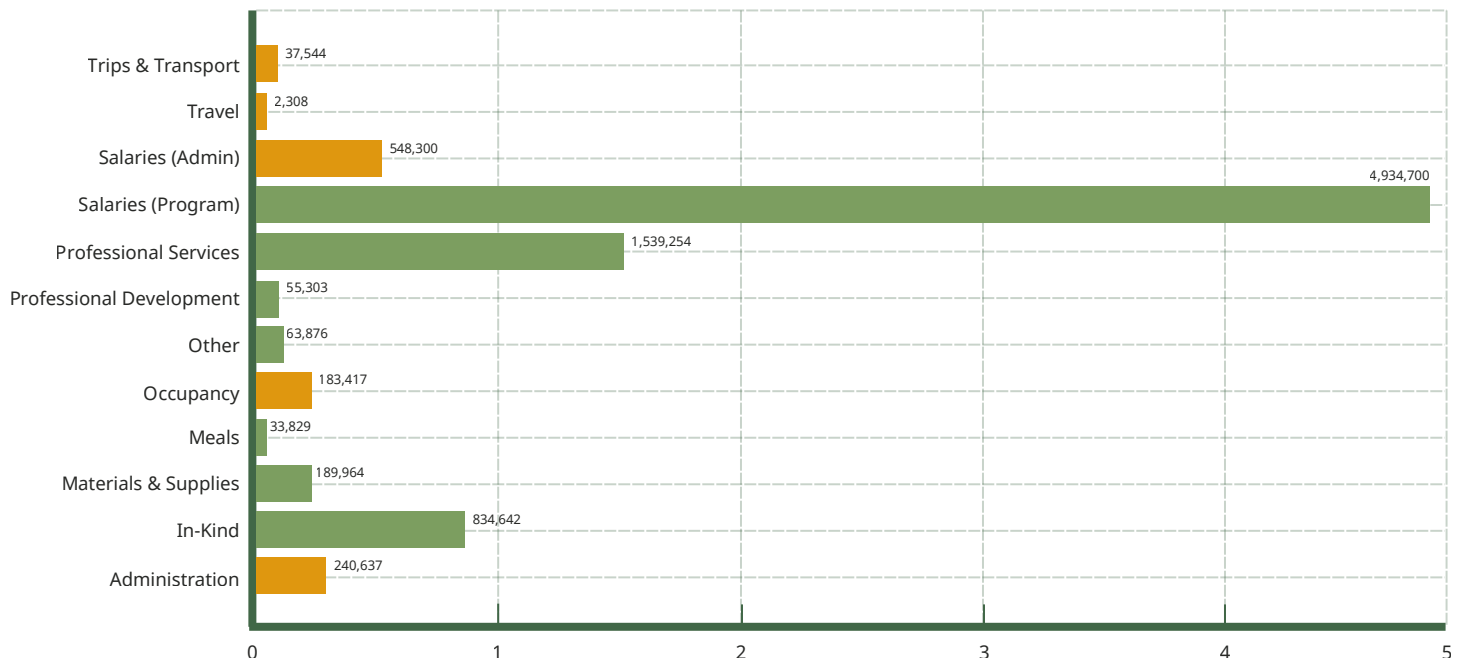
Financials

The Montessori School of Englewood, every dollar entrusted to us is stewarded with care to ensure maximum benefit for students and families. In 2025, 88% of all spending went directly into teaching and learning, a reflection of our unwavering commitment to put children at the center of everything we do. From classroom instruction to materials, meals, and enrichment, resources are directed where they matter most—supporting students’ daily growth and success. This year, our school provided over \$8 million in educational value, much of it fueled by public grants, generous foundation support, and individual donors. These resources allowed us to invest in highly qualified teachers, deliver hands-on Montessori learning materials, and expand services that directly impact families. While we faced challenges with higher program costs, these investments ensured that children had consistent access to the teachers, resources, and supports they need to thrive. Behind these numbers is the story of a school community that makes a difference every day. Your support helps transform classrooms into spaces where curiosity is nurtured, resilience is built, and children develop the skills to succeed for life. Together, we are not only educating students—we are strengthening families and shaping the future of our community.

Spending Efficiency: Program vs Administration



Expenditure Breakdown by Category



Income Statement - The Montessori School of Englewood

Account	Function	2025 Actual	2025 Budget	Monthly Variance	Actuals Through Jun-25	Budget Through Jun-25	Variance	Total Budget	Remaining
INCOME									
Corporate/Foundation Donations		327,543	200,000	127,543	327,543	200,000	127,543	200,000	-127,543
Individual Donations		128,613	100,000	28,613	128,613	100,000	28,613	100,000	-28,613
In-Kind Donations		834,642	834,642	0	834,642	834,642	0	834,642	0
Other Income		21,380	0	21,380	21,380	0	21,380	0	-21,380
Public Grants (CPS/DFSS)		6,849,213	6,399,390	449,823	6,849,213	6,399,390	449,823	6,399,390	-449,823
Total Income		8,161,389	7,534,032	1,461,989	8,161,389	7,534,032	1,461,989	7,534,032	-1,461,989
Account Income	Function	2025 Actual	2025 Budget	Monthly Variance	Actuals Through Jun-25	Budget Through Jun-25	Variance	Total Budget	Remaining
EXPENSE									
Administration	Admin	240,637	167,482	73,155	240,637	167,482	73,155	167,482	-73,155
In-Kind	Program	834,642	834,642	0	834,642	834,642	0	834,642	0
Materials and Supplies	Program	189,964	90,000	99,964	189,964	90,000	99,964	90,000	-99,964
Meals	Program	33,879	6,150	27,729	33,879	6,150	27,729	6,150	-27,729
Occupancy	Admin	183,471	167,000	16,471	183,471	167,000	16,471	167,000	-16,471
Other	Program	63,876	23,850	40,026	63,876	23,850	40,026	23,850	-40,026
Professional Development	Program	19,034	15,000	4,034	19,034	15,000	4,034	15,000	-4,034
Professional Services	Program	1,593,204	991,000	548,204	1,593,204	991,000	548,204	991,000	-548,204
Salaries and Benefits	90% Program	5,438,090	5,339,508	143,492	5,438,090	5,339,508	143,492	5,339,508	-143,492
Travel	Travel	35,441	25,000	10,441	35,441	25,000	10,441	25,000	-10,441
Trips and Transportation	Travel	37,544	25,000	12,544	37,544	25,000	12,544	25,000	-12,544
Total Expense		8,663,774	6,819,990	1,843,784	8,663,774	6,819,990	1,843,784	6,819,990	-1,843,784
Net Gain/Loss		-502,385	-120,600	-381,785	-502,385	-120,600	-381,785	-120,600	381,785

Donors

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Dorothy Matern
Monica Kuzma
Kathryn McCabe
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Amy Dickerson
Felicia Lang
Alex Yeung
Brightpoint Mentoring
The Honky Tonk
April Jean-Baptiste
Eemaan Butt

Partnerships

Joffrey Ballet
Uniting Voices
Lawyers-Lend-A-Hand
Monarch Awards
Foundation
U of I Master Gardeners
Depave Chicago
Chicago Psychoanalytic
Institute
Food is Power
Next Wave STEM
Girl Scouts
Bright Point Mentoring
Winston & Strawn
Chicago Botanical Garden
Alderman David Moore
(17th Ward of Chicago)
MACTE
Trust for Learning
DFSS

Dear Advocate,

Thank you for supporting The Montessori School of Englewood. Because of you, we can bring the richness of Montessori education into the public sector—ensuring that all children, regardless of background, can learn in an environment that fosters independence, creativity, and a lifelong love of learning.

Montessori is more than a teaching method; it is a philosophy that shapes the whole child. By cultivating critical thinking, compassion, and resilience, we prepare the next generation to lead, innovate, and contribute positively to their communities.

Your belief in this Mission makes all of this possible. We are grateful for your partnership in building a brighter, more equitable future for our students.

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