

Essential Elements for Montessori in the Public Sector

The Essential Elements for Montessori in the Public Sector articulates 25 standards characterizing high fidelity Montessori implementation in the public sector. The document is based on consensus work by major national Montessori organizations over the last 25 years, which was then refined and elaborated by the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS). Subject to continuous review by Montessori experts as well as school operators, the purpose of this document is to articulate nationally recognized standards of Montessori fidelity, with detailed focus on the policies and practices necessary to sustain public Montessori programs over the long term.

The Essential Elements Rubric

The Essential Elements Rubric (EER) is a tool for assessing a school's progress toward Montessori implementation that is both integral and sustainable. Based on 25 standards across the five domains -- Adults, Environment, Leadership and Organizational Development, Family Engagement, and Assessment, the rubric articulates set criteria across a four-point scale from Exemplary to Unsatisfactory. Schools can use the EER independently for self-assessment or as part of a Public Montessori School Audit conducted by NCMPS. NCMPS audits are developmental processes, designed to assist as school in developing plans for continuous improvement grounded in Montessori fidelity and sustainability. Each school's path toward full implementation is unique, and frequently characterized by factors beyond the control of the school organization. For this reason, we strongly recommend that EER be used as a formative rather than summative evaluative tool.

Fidelity and Sustainability

Because delivering Montessori in the public sector presents unique challenges, the tool addresses two overarching factors associated with successful implementation: fidelity and sustainability. The first two domains, Adults and Environment, detail elements of Montessori fidelity, such as trained teachers, prepared assistants, Montessori age groupings, a three-hour work cycle, Montessori materials, etc. Of course, schools can also ensure Montessori fidelity by seeking recognition or accreditation from appropriate Montessori organizations. The remaining three domains address sustainability in the public environment. Montessori trained leadership and instructional support, provision for ongoing teacher training and professional development, family engagement with the program, and appropriate assessment are among the criteria for success.

Guidelines for Independent Use

Using the Essential Elements Rubric

The EER can be used independently or as part of a Public Montessori School Audit. Contact NCMPS at services@public-montessori.org for more information. To date, schools who have used the EER independently have tended to focus their efforts on reflection for strategic planning. Below are some insights gained from current users of the tool.

Preparing for use

Begin by distributing the rubric to school stakeholders. It can be helpful to hold a faculty/staff or all-school meeting to discuss the five domains and the purpose of the tool.

Some schools have assigned numerical values to each item in order to score school performance. For instance, there are three items in Domain 1, which, based on the four-point scale for each item, could yield a maximum score of 12. Domain 2 has a nine items, and a maximum score of 36, and so on. Numerical scores can be useful in providing graphic representations for reports, especially in reports to external stakeholders, such as districts or authorizers.

At the same time, we strongly urge schools to focus, first, on the descriptive, qualitative nature of what the rubric can surface, and, second, on insights gained from the assessment that can be made actionable.

Using the Tool

We recommend beginning the process of self-assessment by inviting individual stakeholders to assign ratings independently, followed by a facilitated gathering to discuss individual ratings and, based on those rating, develop a plan for improvement. A suggested agenda for such a meeting is as follows:

- I. Gathering and Ground Rules
- II. Round Robin Sharing of Ratings
- III. Discussion of Agreements and Variances
- IV. Consent on Final Ratings
- V. Identifying Goals for Improvement

Following the meeting, which should conclude with a DRAFT statement of goals for improvement, many schools appoint a committee to develop an action plan. The action plan outlines specific steps to be taken toward achieving identified goals.

Progress monitoring, then, becomes essential to ensuring both follow through and community buy-in. We recommend that check-in gatherings take place at least quarterly, with, at a minimum, an annual report.