

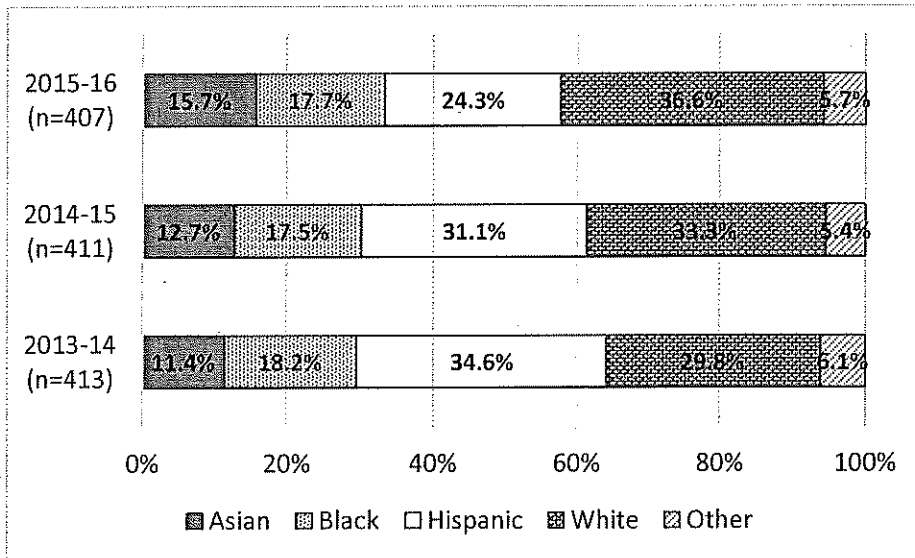
Arlington Public Schools

Early Childhood Program Evaluation Report

Prepared by the Office of Planning and Evaluation
Response from the Early Childhood Office

January 2016

Figure 13: Montessori Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity



The full Pre-K enrollment report is available in **Appendix C1**.

Discontinuation of Montessori in Kindergarten Year

Kindergarten discontinuation is a larger issue at satellite schools than the countywide program at Drew Model School. Parents who choose to discontinue Montessori for their child’s kindergarten year appear to be motivated primarily by factors of convenience rather than dissatisfaction with the program.

The Montessori learning experience is cumulative; what a child learns in the kindergarten year builds on what was learned in previous Montessori years. The kindergarten year is the culmination of this learning when the child internalizes these early concrete experiences, building a strong educational foundation. The value of the first two years cannot be fully realized if the child does not continue working with the Montessori materials to complete the three-year cycle.

Over the past two years, between 35-38% of primary Montessori students discontinued the program and enrolled in a regular APS kindergarten classroom for their kindergarten year. Disaggregating the data by site shows a large difference between the countywide program at Drew Model School, and the satellite programs at neighborhood schools.

Figure 14 and **Figure 15** show the percentage of students who left Montessori for their kindergarten year by site in 2015-16 and 2014-15. While just 16-20% of Drew students left Montessori in kindergarten, between 42-48% of students at satellite programs did.

Figure 14: 2015-16 Percent of Students to Leave Montessori Program in the Kindergarten Year, Drew vs. Satellite Schools

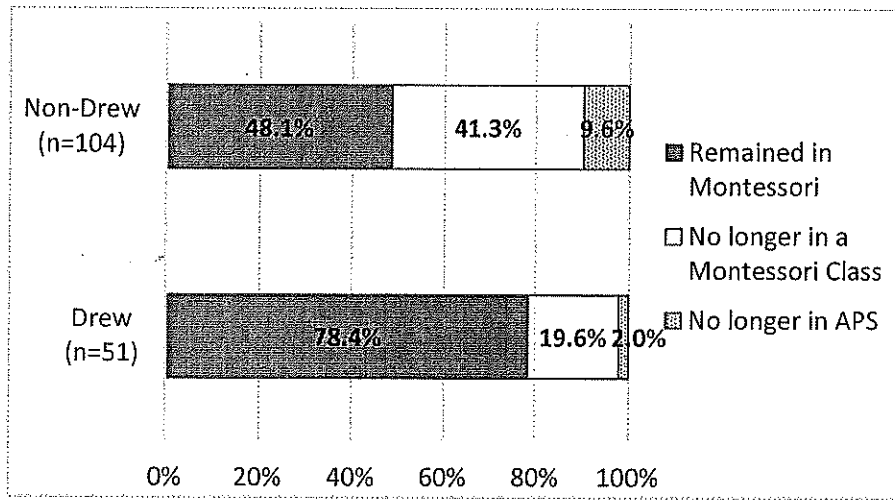
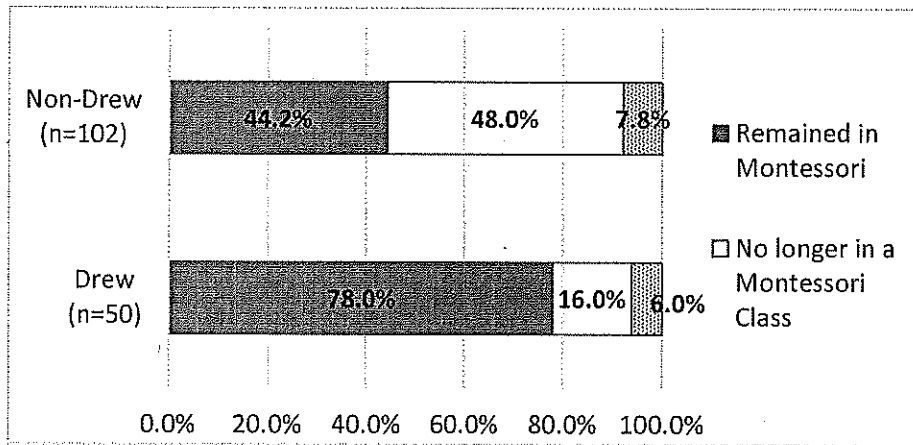


Figure 15: 2014-15 Percent of Students to Leave Montessori Program in the Kindergarten Year, Drew vs. Satellite Schools



During the 2015-16 school year, the Office of Planning and Evaluation administered three¹⁰ parent surveys as part of this evaluation. A survey was administered in the fall to parents of current kindergartners who had previously been enrolled in an APS primary Montessori class but discontinued Montessori for their kindergarten year. In the spring, a survey was administered to parents of all current APS pre-K students, as well as primary Montessori students in their kindergarten year.

In an effort to understand parents' reasons for choosing to discontinue the Montessori program for their child's kindergarten year, parent survey responses about the Montessori program were compared across two groups of parents of APS kindergartners:

¹⁰ Results for one of these surveys (parents of students who did not attend Pre-K) have been excluded due to a low number of responses.

- Those who were currently enrolled in a primary Montessori program (spring survey)
- Those who had previously been enrolled in a primary Montessori program but who discontinued Montessori for their kindergarten year (fall survey)

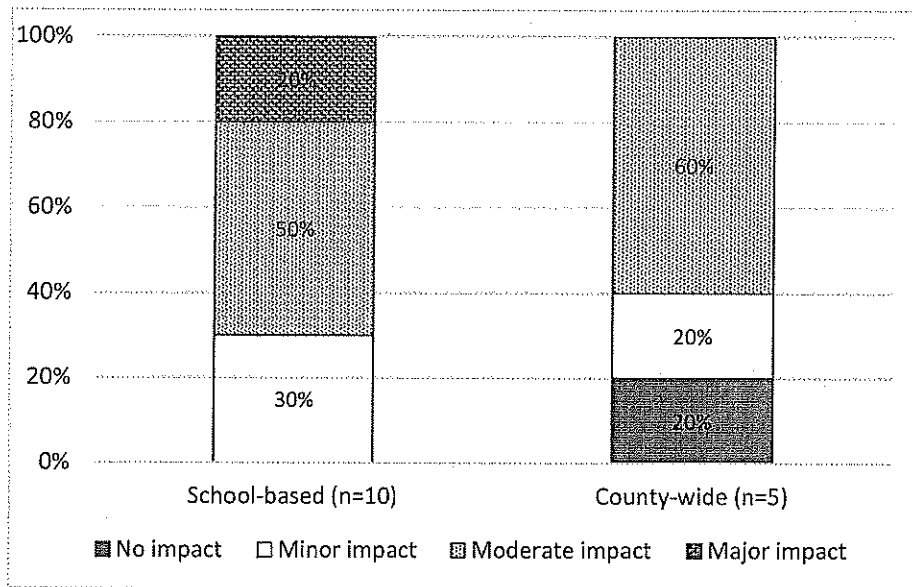
The response rate for the current parent survey was 25% with a margin of error of 4.81. The response rate for the Montessori discontinuation survey was 37%, with a margin of error of 17.55. Generally, survey results with a margin of error lower than five are considered reliable. The higher margin of error for the kindergarten discontinuation survey is due to the low overall population. The survey was sent to just 54 parents total, so while it attained a higher response rate than is typical for parent surveys, the margin of error is higher. Given this higher margin of error, broad descriptions are included in this report, but should be interpreted with caution. Full details are available in **Appendix D1**. A summary of findings follows:

- The most popular **reason for enrolling a child in the primary Montessori program** for each group of parents was *I am interested in the Montessori philosophy*, although this was selected more frequently among current Montessori parents than former Montessori parents.
- Former Montessori parents were more likely to indicate that they had **considered private Pre-K providers in addition to APS Montessori when they researched Pre-K options for their child**.
- Current Montessori parents were far more likely to select *cost/fees* and *reputation of program* as **factors that led them to ultimately choose the APS primary Montessori program**, while former Montessori parents were more likely to select *convenience*.
- Two-thirds of respondents who were former Montessori parents reported **household incomes of \$150,000 or higher** while just over a third of respondents who were current Montessori parents reported this level of income.
- Among respondents who were former Montessori parents, the **top reasons for discontinuing Montessori for their child's kindergarten year** primarily related to issues of convenience rather than dissatisfaction with the program:
 - I have another child who attends our home school and it was more convenient to send both children to the same school.
 - My child's program was moved to another school.
 - I wanted my child to start at his/her home school during his/her kindergarten year

Montessori teachers and assistants responded to a series of questions about kindergarten discontinuation in the fall 2015 staff survey. Their responses follow the same pattern as the discontinuation data above. Staff at the satellite programs report that they lose *multiple kindergarten students every year* at a much higher rate than Drew staff (58% vs 14%).

Figure 16 shows responses to a follow-up question, "**How much of an impact does kindergarten attrition have on your ability to implement the Montessori program with fidelity?**" Twenty percent of satellite staff indicated that kindergarten attrition has a *major impact*, while the same proportion of Drew staff reported that it has *no impact*. The most popular response for both groups was *moderate impact* (50% for satellite programs and 60% for Drew).

Figure 16: How much of an impact does kindergarten attrition have on your ability to implement the Montessori program with fidelity?



Out of twelve responses to an open-ended question about how kindergarten attrition impacts staff's ability to implement the Montessori program, most (six) pointed out that kindergarten students serve as role models in the primary Montessori classroom, which is important both to the younger students who learn from the older students, and to the older students who apply what they have learned by teaching the younger students.

Montessori is based on social learning and well balanced multi-age classroom environment. If we do not have this balance, we miss a key factor which is the older kids teaching the younger ones, the older kids being a role model, and the older kids having the opportunity to apply what is learned by teaching the little ones. This is a very important dynamic in Montessori.

The second most popular answer (four) referred to the flip side of having too few kindergartners: having too many three-year-olds. Respondents felt that having a disproportionately high number of three-year-olds increases the demand on teachers and assistants to spend more focused time on these needier students.

It disrupts the ratio of ages. A majority of three year olds in a class makes it more difficult to have lengthy and focused lessons/discussions.

Ideally a third of students are kindergartners. Having fewer means that the non-kindergarten students, who are less independent and limited in their work choices need more attention strictly because there are more of them. This can reduce the quality time that the teacher needs with the Ks.

The full report on Montessori kindergarten discontinuation is available in **Appendix C3**. The staff survey report is available in **Appendix D4**, and the parent survey report is available in **Appendix D1**.

