

**Testimony before the Joint Fiscal Committees
on the SFY 2026-27 Executive Budget
Human Services Budget Hearing
February 5, 2026**

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to present testimony on the 2026-27 New York State Executive Budget.

My name is Dr. K.T. Korngold. I am the Director of the Montessori Children's Center in West Harrison, NY. We were the first Montessori program *in the United States* to offer full-time, year-round Montessori child care to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. We have been at the forefront of advocating for Montessori for all: incorporating all age groups--including infants and toddlers--, expanding Montessori into the public sector, and serving as a role model for excellence in child care and early education.

We have been advocating for the expansion of high-quality child care and early education for more than 50 years! In fact, I was a child in the demonstration class of the first cohort of New York City HEAD START teachers, in a Montessori training held in 1967 at SUNY Albany.

I serve as Co-Chair of the Advocacy Committee of the New York Montessori Alliance (NYSMA). We represent Montessori schools throughout the state, of which there are almost 150.

Many parents choose Montessori for their very young children. Montessori is a liberatory, child-centered curriculum that teaches tolerance, peaceful conflict resolution, and acceptance of difference. Montessori helps children develop a sense of purpose while fostering meaningful connections with others. Montessori provides child with useful skills, positive attitudes toward learning, and a sense of purpose. As stated by Dr. Ulcca Joshi Hansen, "Montessori developed the holistic indigenous education approach in response to similar alienation and similar crisis...(she) saw education as a force for the liberation of individuals, societies and the planet as a whole, as a response to educational intuitions that had ignored the richness, diversity, and vulnerability of childhood experience" (2021, Hansen, U., *The Future of Smart*, p. 105).

Montessori programs want to facilitate meeting the need for more child care spaces and overcoming the current shortages. We want to participate and offer our help in this pivotal, transformational moment as universal child care becomes a reality in New York State.

Montessori schools are glad that both Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani are moving forward with expanding universal child care, but we have some concerns regarding the details of execution to ensure that Montessori programs are included, that teachers are fairly compensated, and that parents can continue to choose Montessori within the universal child care system.

While we support the expansion of universal child care we have some concerns about various details and hope to be of help as these are finalized:

1) Who will serve as the oversight mechanism and distribute funds? Will it be school districts or OCFS?

- A. School districts being the source of funds and oversight for universal child will create a lot of confusion and unnecessary bureaucracy for programs that have been successfully and independently educating and caring for children for years.

Currently, our child center has enrolled children from **20 different school districts**. We have children from Yonkers to Mt. Kisco, Bedford to Greenburg. If school districts are overseeing each child care center, will my center *be required to complete 20 RFPS*, one for each school district? That will be an insurmountable barrier to access.

B. What if school districts excludes Montessori curriculum from their universal child care programs?

While Yonkers has Montessori in their public school system, including elementary schools, middle schools, and even a Montessori High School, the school district where we are located (Harrison) requires only programs that offer the Scholastic *Pre-K On My Way!* to submit an RFP for U-PreK contracts. Further, they do not recognize the Montessori teaching credential as a qualification for the Head Teacher role.

Would that mean I could have Yonkers children attending my program through the universal child care program because they appreciate Montessori but not our neighborhood Harrison children?

Many parents today select Montessori for their children for good reasons. There is a robust presence of Montessori education in our state, particularly in Westchester County. We want to ensure that can continue as universal child care expands.

2) Workforce Compensation

We join others in asking for the creation of a permanent state fund and investment of \$1.2 billion to increase child care worker compensation sufficient to offer all members of the child care workforce a significant boost in income (Child Care Workforce Pay Equity Fund S.5533 (Brisport)/A.492 (Hevesi)).

While the cost of child care tuition is high, programs face significant headwinds from other expenses including skyrocketing health insurance, double-digit increases in our liability and umbrella insurance, newly approved increases in electricity and gas, etc. all which dig deeply into our budgets. New York cannot achieve universal child care without recruiting and retaining many more professionals in the field, which will not be possible without a significant, sustained, compensation hike.

There are known, reported shortages in child care workers, which impact our capacity. While we invest a lot in our teachers, paying for their Montessori training and contributing toward their health insurance, we still have a challenges attracting new staff. Without help to decrease health insurance and liability costs, many programs may need to close. Workforce compensation is one way to help sustain and grow the childcare workforce to help meet the need for workers in New York State.

3) Montessori on the Career Ladder

As the state moves forward to develop a plan for subsequent years to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder based on agreed-upon criteria to inform compensation levels after the base pay scale for all has been increased, we want to help ensure that Montessori is appropriately included on that ladder.

In New York State, the Montessori teaching credential *does not have a pathway toward state licensure*. Ten other states have pathways toward state licensure that include the Montessori Credential.

The prerequisite for a Montessori credential for Infants and Toddlers is an associate's degree. Yet the APSIRE registry sets the level for that teacher at the same level as their degree and does not add an additional rung for the work they have done for their credential. The prerequisite for the early childhood teacher who takes their Montessori training is a bachelor's degree. Many states set the Montessori credential at bachelor's or master's level on their registries, which is a more accurate measure given the hours, scope of work, and lengthy nine-month internship required to obtain a Montessori teaching credential.

In 16 other states, child-care licensing regulations recognize a Montessori credential for lead teacher status. Yet, New York State undervalues the credential, placing it at the level of a CDA, when in fact the contact hours, student-teaching hours, and requirements far exceed those of a CDA. According to the Child Development Associate Council, to receive a Child Development Associate (CDA), the national teaching credential for early childhood professional working with children from birth to 5, a teacher must receive 120 clock hours in a CDA teacher education course (Council for Professional Recognition, 2021). In contrast, the infant and toddler Montessori teacher receives **twice as many clock hours**, a minimum of 210 hours of teacher education coursework, plus a 9-month student-teaching internship for an infant and toddler credential. The early childhood Montessori teacher receives 300 clock hours plus a 9-month student teaching internship.

If a teacher's workforce compensation is to be based on their credential/license, it is important that the level of the Montessori credential be appropriately assessed.

Here is a crosswalk from the Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI) that outlines the current state of Montessori in terms of national recognition.

<https://montessoriadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Credential-Recognition-One-Pager-1.pdf>

4) How will the universal program affect high-quality programs with mixed-age group curriculums?

As is true in other high quality developmentally appropriate child care programs, our children are in mixed-age groupings, with preschool classes combining 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds and toddler classes combining children from 18 to 36 months. We already have begun to lose some four- and five-year-old children to public programs. If we lose all four-year-olds, it will financially decimate our Montessori programs and further destroy a key feature of the Montessori experience: mixed-age learning with children remaining in the same class, with the same teachers, for a two-to-three-year period -- a proven method that creates stability, continuity, and a strong foundation for trust and learning.

If two-year-olds have universal child care, what then becomes of those mixed-age toddler rooms for 18- to 36-month-olds?

If the plan is to have universal child care destroy long-standing existing programs, this is surely the way to do it. Montessori programs cannot survive on the enrollment of infants through 23-month-old toddlers alone and it is neither our pedagogy nor philosophy to be limited to infants and young toddlers.

The antidote to these challenges is to make sure Montessori programs are included as universal child care programs, that teachers are compensated fairly for their Montessori training, and that parents can continue to choose Montessori for their children within the universal child care system.

Montessori is a proven educational method that has demonstrated positive results for children, including higher scores on several measures of **academic achievement**, **social understanding**, and mastery orientation.

Here is a link to one of the recent studies:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01783/full>

A comparison of public school Montessori and non-Montessori students in kindergarten through second grade found that Montessori children have higher levels of **self-regulation** and more consistent **growth in self-regulation skills**.

<https://montessoriadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/A-3-year-study-of-self-regulation.pdf>

Surely, we want more children to have access to an education system that supports academic achievement, social understanding, self-regulation, and growth in self-regulation skills!

Montessori is a well-loved and successful educational approach that can lead to positive outcomes in the future and parents want it for their children now. If Montessori is not included in the universal child care offerings, I fear we will be creating a two-tier system with public free child care at some centers and PRIVATE Montessori child care in others. I don't think that is what any of us want.

As Governor Hochul and Mayor Mamdani make these revolutionary changes to how early childhood education is offered to our New York State families, Montessori would be proud to have a seat at the table. I sincerely hope you'll invite me along with other Montessori leaders to lend a hand in the planning so Montessori can be part of the solution with Montessori programs among those who can offer universal child care in New York State.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



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