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KU Center for Montessori Research receives grant for first large-scale randomized controlled trial study examining public Montessori’s potential for closing the achievement gap

Lawrence, Kansas: The KU Center for Montessori Research has been selected to manage the multi-site database and conduct the aggregated analysis for a new study funded by the Brady Education Foundation. The study will investigate how Montessori early childhood education impacts the academic and social–emotional development of children. Specifically this study will focus on determining if Montessori education is equally effective across cultural groups and if it reduces the effects of lower family income.

Joining the KU Center for Montessori Research for the study will be data collection teams at Child Trends and The Riley Institute at Furman University in South Carolina. KU Center for Montessori Research director, Dr. Angela Murray says, “This project is ideal for the KU Center for Montessori research because it leverages our psychometric and data analytic capabilities and expertise in Montessori education along with our emphasis on collaborative research.”

This study is one of the largest randomized controlled trials of its kind, capitalizing on school lotteries to identify the initial study sample of children at the age of 3 and follow them over 3 years through kindergarten. Small studies have shown promising results suggesting that Montessori students achieve greater academic growth and show stronger social–emotional outcomes than their peers, but this project expands the analysis to multiple schools with a much larger sample size. Participants will be drawn from sites across the U.S. and results are expected to be released late in 2022.

“A great amount of research documents the effects of the opportunity/achievement gap, both for low income kids and kids of color,” says Liz Pungello Bruno, president of Brady Education Foundation. “While high-fidelity Montessori education has been shown to promote positive outcomes for children, we need more research using rigorous designs with larger sample sizes to do the critical subgroup analyses.” A [recent study](#) of public Montessori in Hartford, Connecticut conducted by Dr. Angeline Lillard of the University of Virginia and her colleagues, showed positive outcomes with a rigorous but small design. Furman University’s recently released [study](#) on public Montessori programs in South Carolina was large but was not a randomized controlled trial design.

Although Montessori education is available for infants through adolescents, this study focuses on the impact of the early childhood level because research suggests developmentally appropriate programs for this age group that address the needs of the whole child hold promise for improving outcomes. Montessori education is unique in that it balances child-directed academic content with an equal emphasis on moral, emotional and behavioral development. Teachers carefully design environments which allow children to be relatively free to explore a variety of hands-on lessons at their own pace based on personal interests within long blocks of uninterrupted time—typically up to three hours. Each early childhood classroom includes children ranging in age from 3 to 6 years old.

This study is important because it offers the first large-scale, rigorous assessment of the potential for a holistic educational approach like Montessori which balances academics and concerns for optimal human development to impact diverse populations of preschoolers in important ways.

ABOUT THE KU Center for Montessori Research

INSERT BOILERPLATE LANGUAGE ABOUT CENTER

The mission of the KU Center for Montessori Research is to engage in collaborative research, evaluation, and dissemination activities for building a robust body of knowledge so that Montessori education and philosophy will benefit all children.