

Five things you should know about Montessori education



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Children work on projects in a Montessori class at Miller Park Community School in Coquitlam. Jason Payne / PNG

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Montessori is a choice program — like French immersion, parents and their children opt into the program in public schools. It is also offered in many private schools throughout B.C. The programs are popular and usually full. In the Coquitlam School District there are nine elementary schools offering Montessori classes. Postmedia News visited one of those classrooms in December before school let out for Christmas holidays.

What is Montessori education?

[Montessori](#) programs in B.C. follow the provincial curriculum, however they also follow an educational philosophy created by Maria Montessori more than 100 years ago. Christi Livingstone, a Montessori teacher in Coquitlam, says the most significant differences are the materials used in the classrooms and children manage their own learning more. At the beginning of each week, Livingstone will assign five tasks that students must complete, but the order or timing of each task is up to the students.



What types of materials are used in a Montessori classroom?

The Montessori materials are one significant difference. For example, small round beads are commonly used for learning math. Starting in preschool, students will use beads to represent numbers and as they get older the numbers get bigger — in Livingstone’s Grade 4 and 5 class, students were using ones, tens, hundreds, thousands and tens of thousands. The beads or blocks and tools are like an abacus or a counting board and can be used for everything from simple addition to long division and trinomial equations. Livingstone, who did not attend a Montessori school as a child, said that learning math for her was always an abstraction until she studied to become a Montessori teacher, when it became more concrete.



Why do people choose Montessori for their children?

Livingstone says it gives kids more opportunities. “It is just another tool that they have in their tool kit,” she says. When Postmedia News visited Livingstone’s classroom, the students were given open time to choose what they wanted to work on. Most of the students chose one of several math activities or a mapping geography activity. Livingstone said at least half of the week is spent with the students choosing the activity



What else should people know about Montessori programs?

Livingstone said there is no regulation for Montessori programs, so the programs can vary widely. However in public schools, Montessori programs must follow the B.C. curriculum, so there is consistency there. A Montessori education also includes “great lessons” which cover big ideas like the creation of the universe, the coming of human beings and the stories of numbers and writing. Livingstone said the stories are designed to give children a sense of meaning in their education and the concept that they have things to contribute. Google founders Sergey Brin and Larry Page have spoken publicly about attending Montessori preschool.

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