



How to identify authentic Montessori: Primary

All Montessori schools are not created equal. Montessori isn't a trademarked name, nor is Montessori a franchised operation. Each school interprets Montessori differently: some schools invest in everything needed to deliver a high-quality, authentic Montessori experience, while others may combine elements of Montessori with other approaches, or may make quality trade-offs to offer programs at a tuition that appeals to a broader group of families.

At LePort Montessori, we pride ourselves in offering a high-quality, authentic Montessori environment and a warm, thoughtful community experience for parents and children alike. As you research different school options, here is a quick cheat-sheet that will allow you to evaluate how authentic and high-quality the Montessori approach is at different schools you may consider.

Montessori concepts and principles	LePort	Others
A beautiful, purposefully-prepared environment		
• Wooden furniture arranged to create different spaces and to display materials in an orderly, appealing way	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Natural, subdued shades of color , with purposeful wall displays at child's height; no visual clutter	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Access to nature —e.g., real grass, gardening areas, flowers & plants in the classroom; outside workspaces with easy access for children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schedule & class structure		
• An uninterrupted 3-hour work period in the morning, and 2 hours in the afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• A full mix of three years (ages 3-6) in one room, including Kindergarten (no separate K/1 or Pre-K/K classes)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Background of the adults & adult/child interactions		
• High-quality Montessori training for lead teacher (accredited AMI or AMS classes, vs. in-house training or self-study/short online courses)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Respectful, deliberate adult-child interactions : calm, soft voices; explanations for processes rather than abrupt commands; adult at child's level with eye contact when speaking with individual children	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A good Montessori primary classroom (ages 3-6) has four clearly identifiable areas: Practical Life, Sensorial/Cultural, Language, and Math, with opportunities for artistic and musical expression available throughout the classroom. While there are hundreds of materials in a well-equipped, authentic Montessori classroom, here is a list of a few that tell the tale of authenticity and quality. Observe whether the materials are **available** (displayed in a nice, orderly way on the shelves), **in use** (a wide range of activities should be going on, across all four classroom areas, at any time), and **in good shape** (well-maintained, attractive looking, versus worn or chipped).

Montessori materials and activities	LePort	Others
Practical Life: Care of self, community, environment		
• Food preparation: real knives, wooden boards, and real food prepared by children and served by them to friends (as against velcroed wooden items)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Snack & lunches with ceramic plates, glasses, placemats and real silverware (vs. paper plates and plastic)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• “Practical Practical Life:” work done for a meaningful purpose, rather than pretend work. E.g., sewing a real button on an apron vs. lacing shape toys; flower arranging with real flowers to be enjoyed; cleaning up real messes with real tools (brooms, crumbers...)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Art activities that focus on the exploration of art —vs. adult-led uniform or worksheet-based products	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sensorial/Cultural Studies		
• The Montessori Bells —a music material with a set of matching metal bells on a dedicated stand—in each classroom and in use. <i>This is an expensive material, and many schools do not invest in it—but it is critical for a quality Montessori music program.</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Other advanced materials present, in use, and in good shape —e.g., a full assortment of puzzle maps of each continent; the Binomial and Trinomial Cubes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Language		
• Cursive Sandpaper Letters for children to trace, as well as cursive moveable alphabets of different sizes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The Farm: a miniature farm with a building, yard, and farm animal figurines, used to explore grammar concepts	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mathematics		
• The Montessori Bead Cabinet: a shallow shelf with hanging colored bead chains, bead squares and bead cubes, from one (red) to tens (gold)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The Golden Beads: a set of beads (may include cubes with colored circles) to practice arithmetic into the thousands	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• The Small and Large Bead Frames: an abacus of red, blue, and green beads, with four or seven rows of beads (2x or 3x green, 1x or 2x blue and red)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Materials and activities you will not see in a quality Montessori primary room		
• Computers, TVs or any other screen-based technology used by children. (Teachers may have iPads or computers for record keeping.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Traditional toys—e.g., dress-up, dolls, LEGOs, board games, etc. <i>(These may be on a moveable shelf for after-school use, or early in the year for new children, but it should be visibly set apart from the Montessori activities.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Worksheets. You may see ruled or squared pieces of paper. You should not see pre-printed worksheets being colored in or written on by children in large volume. <i>(Exception: at the end of the year, some children moving on to 1st grade in traditional school may receive transitional lessons on how to work with worksheets.)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>