



The MIChoice/ Choice Schools Associates Public Montessori Charter School Model

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The Vision Behind the MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori Program

The vision of the MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates Montessori School Model is for each Academy to become a recognized model of Montessori learning and a thriving, diverse community that respects students, inspires teachers, supports families and enhances the community. Enriched through this model, our children will be academically, socially and emotionally ready to take their place in our world.

The Mission of the MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori Program

MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' mission is to ensure that each Montessori Academy under its umbrella provides an exemplary Montessori education to all enrolled students, which supports the development of the whole child. Our public Montessori charter schools are expected to become a respected part of the community known for academic excellence and for providing a nurturing, creative learning environment, where the Montessori materials and philosophy inspire students toward individualized discovery, a love of learning, and a development of a deep respect for self, others, and the environment. Students and graduates will exhibit the skills developed during their Montessori schooling on a daily basis, including higher-level thinking, self-confidence and independent decision-making, and as a result become life-long learners and true global citizens.

The Educational Goals of MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori Academies

Educational Goals of each public Montessori Academy under management with MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates grow out of Montessori practices and the Michigan School Accountability Scorecard (MSAS) System. The Michigan Curriculum Framework is embedded in the approved curriculum, and Grade Level Competencies are identified to ensure that students are well prepared for the MEAP, or it's online equivalent (SBAC) and standardized assessments, with the objective that all students will be scored "proficient" or above each year. As this is achieved, the Academy will be expected to earn a Green Proficiency Rating when scored by the measures of MSAS as defined by the Michigan Department of Education. These combined, overarching goals have been identified as a means of providing positive proof that the academic needs of the student population the Academy will serve are being met.

Specific Measurable Academic Goals:

- The Academy will increase student achievement in accordance with MSAS requirements in the core academic subjects of Reading, Mathematics and Science.
- Students in Grades K-8 will be assessed using Scantron's Ed Performance Series every fall, mid-year, and end-of-year to determine individual academic progress, and whether or not the student meets college-bound proficiency levels.
- Staff will review standardized assessments as teaching teams to ensure students are on grade-level. Results will be used to guide individual student-learning plans, with the goal of meeting

or exceeding the annual measurable objectives for proficiency on the MEAP or its online equivalent.

- Students who test at or above grade level will show a minimum one-year growth each year. Children who enter the Academy performing below grade level will have a minimum growth of 1.3 grade levels their first year and, if continually enrolled at the Academy, will meet the College and Career Readiness Growth and Achievement Benchmarks by the end of three years.
- By its third year of operation the Academy will earn a Green Proficiency rating through the MSAS accreditation process, and will maintain that grade in subsequent years of operation.
- The Academy will be ranked in the upper half of the state's top-to-bottom list.
- Students will be evaluated approximately every two weeks to determine if they are working on grade level. Students found performing below grade level will have targeted educational goals recorded in their individual student-learning plans, and may be required to receive assistance from Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) or participate in the Academy's "Academic Acceleration" program, which provides additional, one-on-one support in core academic subjects. Once participation begins, subsequent evaluations will be reviewed during teaching-team meetings, and learning plans will be modified, or the student will be able to discontinue their participation in Academic Acceleration based on the achievement of appropriate academic goals.
- Students continuously below grade level as identified through the assessments outlined above may also be provided additional services as prescribed either in their individual student-learning plan or through a more formal IEP process. Services may include MTSS, Title support or other appropriate interventions as suggested by specialists and/or staff members.
- Student growth will be regularly reviewed on an individual basis by staff-led teaching teams using the assessments outlined above and/or others such as: (Scantron) Ed Performance Series assessments, teacher-created assessments based on the Montessori curriculum, Brigance Assessment, AIMSweb testing, CTBS (Terra Nova) assessment, MEAP tests, and the ACT family of assessments. Data results collected from these assessments, and any other relevant testing methods, will be regularly reviewed and utilized to determine both overall and individual mastery of the curriculum, and to confirm whether or not there is a need for additional academic support for students at the Academy.

Other Non-Academic Goals

The Academy proposes the following additional goals:

- **Culture of Discipline:** The Academy will create a school culture based on consistency of purpose, core values, high academic and ethical standards, a passion for excellence, and responsible, civil behavior.
- **Community Engagement:** The Academy will seek to establish partnerships with local groups and organizations that embrace a similar mission and vision, such as colleges, other elementary/middle schools, or local volunteer organizations. Through these partnerships and students' participation in real-life educational opportunities by means of hands-on service projects, Academy graduates will gain a greater understanding of how to improve not only their own community, but also the global community through the knowledge they acquire.
- **Parent Involvement:** The Academy will develop a well-rounded communications plan that establishes strong relationships with parents and guardians. The plan will include appropriate resources and support services for families of children who attend the Academy. The Academy will also develop a parent involvement plan consistent with law and based on the

Joyce Epstein Model that will ensure parental involvement in school improvement and other important school development activities.

- **Financial Health:** The Academy will ensure that financial policies and procedures establish clear and sound operating standards for financial management, and that the school budget will focus on student achievement outcomes and fiscal stability through its balanced spending plan.
- **Operational Efficiency and Development:** The Academy Board, in consultation with the Educational Service Provider, will establish accountability standards for all areas of operations in order to establish efficiency and provide effectiveness targets, with the goal of developing the long-term sustainability of quality services.
- **Governance and Leadership:** The Academy Board, in partnership with the Educational Service Provider, will establish policies, procedures, and administrative guidelines that are consistent with authorizer contractual requirements, Federal and State requirements, including laws, court decisions, and agency regulations, and will use these to form and implement a strategic plan that guides the Academy's development.

What Is the Montessori Method?

The Montessori philosophy and educational method specifically states that a child-centered, individualized approach to learning is the best way to successfully teach students. It's founder, Maria Montessori, was not only an educator, but also a scientist, who sought to discover the most effective ways to instruct students so that they would excel academically. She focused not only on curriculum, but also on how her students could become better citizens who modeled peace within their community. Her testing of these theories led to a written method of instruction, which we today identify as "Montessori Education." The Montessori method inherently enhances student achievement, and includes the following tenets:

- **Individualized, Differentiated Learning** – Montessori education is built around the belief that all learners are individuals in style, pace and interests. Educational models using differentiated instruction have been shown to increase student success and satisfaction in school.
- **Mixed-Age Groupings** – The mixed-age classrooms provide numerous benefits, including a greater range of curriculum options, the ability to have a room consisting of a wide range of learners (including children who would be labeled as gifted to ones with special needs), overall reduced student competition and numerous opportunities for positive peer mentoring.
- **Prepared Environment** – Montessori instruction progresses from concrete explorations to abstract understandings. A Montessori classroom consists of strategic centers, each containing activities, materials and hands-on projects that are designed to engage the learner. Students explore these areas at his/her pace, and with teacher direction they are regularly challenged to explore ideas that are more difficult and can do so without trepidation or a fear of failure.
- **Character Education** – Montessori emphasizes the values of grace, courtesy, respect and responsibility. Teachers are not only to teach these values to students, but also to model them.
- **Integrated Teaching** – Montessori education uses interdisciplinary teaching to encourage connections across the curriculum and to students' personal lives. When students understand the purpose and relation of their activities, they in turn become self-motivated learners.
- **Community Connection** – Students begin to understand the world around them by first being a part of their own classroom community, and then by later participating in community projects

that extend beyond the school itself. These student-led projects reach out to the areas surrounding the Academy, and by personal experience students discover their own inborn talents and how they can use these to become productive global citizens.

The Montessori method is widely used throughout the world on every continent (except Antarctica) and has been proven to be a successful educational model among extremely different cultures and socioeconomic groups. A study by American Montessori International found a strong link between Montessori education through age 11 and superior performance specifically on the math and science scales of the ACT (<http://www.montessori-ami.org/> under the “Research” tab). Other studies cite increased student accomplishments in language and writing skills (see <http://www.montessori-namta.org/Research-Downloads> and <http://www.amshq.org/Publications-and-Research/Research-Library.aspx> for further research models). In fact, numerous academic journals around the globe support the fact that Montessori education is successful on many different levels and in many different populations because the method is intrinsically based on the natural development and learning progression of the child.

Character education is another basic component of the Montessori model. Research reveals that Maria Montessori initially developed her model to specifically address the needs of disadvantaged youth, and her program was successfully used to educate students that had been labeled as “unteachable,” either due to economic status or lack of social skills. After a year of using her brain-based method with her initial students, children were found to have developed positive work skills, were able to work in a group and share ideas in a constructive manner, and as a result not only met, but exceeded, the country’s tests of academic proficiency. The Montessori method’s unique combination and balance of both character building education, and the resulting academic achievement that follows from obtaining these skills, continues to be reported on in news outlets across the world today.

For example, listed below are just two separate studies that underscore these results:

- A 2006 report evaluated the impact of Montessori education on social and academic outcomes for children at the end of two of the most common Montessori age groups: pre-primary (three- to six-year-olds) and elementary (six- to twelve-year olds). The Montessori educated children in the younger age group performed better on standardized tests of reading and math, engaged in more positive interaction on the playground, and showed more advanced social cognition and executive control than students schooled using traditional methods. They also expressed more concern for fairness and justice. The older Montessori children wrote more creative essays with more complex sentence structures, selected more positive responses to social dilemmas, and reported feeling more of a sense of community at school than their traditional public-school peers. (Lillard, A. & Else-Quest, 2006)
- Another group of articles explored differences between traditional and Montessori middle schools in terms of motivation, quality of experience, time use, and perceptions of schools, teachers, and friends. The Montessori students reported more positive perceptions of their school environments and teachers and more often perceived classmates as friends than their public school counterparts. They also reported greater affect, energy, intrinsic motivation and undivided interest in their school subjects. While Montessori students spent more time in school on school related tasks, chores, collaborative work, and individual projects, traditional students spent more time at school engaged in social and leisure activities and in passive,

didactic educational settings (listening to lecture, note taking, watching instructional videos). (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005a, Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005b)

Overall the Montessori curriculum is able to maximize each child's individual potential through its unique multi-age approach and student-tailored instruction. The Montessori philosophy specifically provides a child-centered, individualized approach to teaching and learning. The instructional design of the Montessori philosophy that supports the Academy's mission and vision includes the following components of the curriculum: individualized, differentiated learning, mixed-age groupings, a specialized prepared environment, encouraged parental involvement, character education, integrated teaching and learning, and numerous community service opportunities. These components enhance student-learning outcomes, so that both personal educational goals of the student and those of the Academy as a whole are successfully met.

Academic journals around the globe support the fact that Montessori education is successful on many different levels and in many different populations because the method is intrinsically based on the natural development and learning progression of the child. This model is often considered to be a "holistic" program, because not only does it contain rigorous academics, but it also promotes character development, teaches social skills and develops essential higher-level thinking skills. In addition, many public Montessori schools regularly incorporate STEM-based education into their classrooms, as this is a natural fit with Montessori science lessons. Students are able to gain a strong science and technology foundation by learning skills that lead to future growth and success both on the job and in college.

The time-proven, research-based Montessori method of education is an effective, high-performing model that enhances each child's overall academic achievement, regardless of social or economic background, or previous educational placement. This is due to a strong curriculum that is based on over 100 years of scientific research and results, and that has already been successfully aligned with the Michigan Curriculum Framework, GLCEs and Common Core State Standards.

The MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori Curriculum

The MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori curriculum is constructed through the combination of The Montessori Foundation's Scope and Sequence Curriculum (<http://montessoricompass.com/scope-and-sequence>) and the Houston Montessori Center curriculum (<http://houstonmontessoricenter.org/secondary.html>), which together make up the complete K-8 curriculum. The K-6 portion of the curriculum has already been aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by The Montessori Foundation, and the Houston Montessori Curriculum for grades 7-8 has been aligned to the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations and Curriculum Framework. This copyrighted and trademarked Montessori curriculum is available through MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates agreement to use the Montessori Foundation's nationally recognized Scope and Sequence Curriculum for K-6 and is

aligned with the Common Core State Standards in the subject areas of Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Geography and History.

In 2012, MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori and Michigan standards curriculum experts aligned a different Montessori curriculum that was provided through the North American Montessori Center to the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations. This curriculum was used as a base for their approved "MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates Public Montessori Charter School Curriculum," and is already in use in five of its Montessori charter schools in the state of Michigan.

Subjects offered in each MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Academy include the following:

- Core Subjects: Reading and Writing, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies
- Resource Subjects: Art, Music, Physical Education, Practical Life, Geography, History
- Other Required Subjects*: Health, Sex Education, Communicable Diseases such as HIV/AIDS

Additionally, the Character Choices character education program is incorporated into the MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori education program. The entire curriculum is reviewed annually by Montessori teachers working alongside Choice Schools Associates' Chief Instructional Officer for academic effectiveness and improvement areas. Assessment data is used to test the curriculums' efficacy, and includes student portfolios, teacher-created assessments, Scantron Ed Performance Series Tests, ACT family of assessments, AIMSweb and state mandated tests such as the MEAP, or its SBAC online equivalent.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at each school constantly evaluate the curriculum for alignment of the Intended Curriculum, the Taught Curriculum, and the Assessed Curriculum. Each Academy's PLC also functions as a watchdog for the integrity of Montessori principles and practices. Four fundamental questions are asked constantly during these meetings:

- What is every student expected to learn?
- How will we know if the student learned the competency?
- What are we going to do about students that haven't learned the competency and what other instructional strategies will work to assist them in learning the competency?
- What are we going to do to accelerate learning for students who have already learned on grade level competencies?

The response to these "what" curriculum questions are characterized by activities such as:

- A curriculum map created to specify what content and skills students will learn and when they will learn it.
- Content being aligned to Grade Level Content Expectation/Common Core State Standards.
- Teachers comparing curriculum maps within their own multi-age grouping level to make sure learning targets are clear, flow well, represent depth and breadth, and are rigorous.
- Teachers comparing curriculum maps at the level above and the level below to make sure the targets across grade levels flow well and essential knowledge and skills are mastered for promotion from grade to grade.
- Curriculum maps analyzed between grades to check for redundancy and to refine curriculum and to find opportunities to integrate curriculum.

- Summative data, such as Scantron and MEAP scores, used to validate the intended curriculum-instruction-assessment loop to ensure tested MEAP/SBAC Common Core content expectations are taught to mastery.
- Gateway grades established to ensure that every student is on grade level before promotion to the next grade level. For example, gateway grades may be designated at grades 2, 5, and 7 to encourage accelerated through intense interventions, rather than failure based opportunities, for otherwise retained students.

Central to curriculum evaluation is the belief that evaluation is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself, and provides a rich opportunity for continuous improvement. We pay careful attention to the Written (Intended) Curriculum that is being used as a basis for instruction, and the actual Taught Curriculum, as measured through summative and formative assessments. The curriculum will be evaluated to address these facets using the methods of assessment listed below:

WRITTEN	TAUGHT	LEARNED	SUPPORTED	TESTED
GLCES & COMMON CORE Curriculum and continuous realignment of assessment and instruction	Effectiveness and congruence of instruction with curriculum and assessment	Assessment of school and individual student performance; Data Analysis of formative and summative methods	GLCES & COMMON CORE aligned; quality of Teacher resources & Montessori manipulatives, and professional development	School level tests (teacher & Scantron), State tests, Portfolios, and curriculum-instruction-assessment congruence

In order to ensure that all benchmarks and Grade Level Content Expectations found in the Michigan Curriculum Framework are truly being met, the Montessori curriculum and learning expectations are constantly monitored at each Academy through a well-defined school improvement process. This process includes regular meetings with both horizontal and vertical teaching teams overseen by the Headmaster. As a group they will continually evaluate the Academy’s curriculum by honestly answering the following questions: What is the quality of the curriculum documents? To what extent are the GLCEs, Common Core, and Montessori curriculum aligned? How effectively does the taught curriculum provide positive results on the tested curriculum? The fact-based answers to each question will be required to be supported by data from the following indicators of academic success: performance on standardized tests, student assessment results and the staff’s increased experience and knowledge of using the Montessori method. The regularly reported findings will then be used to drive and shape each Academy’s yearly school improvement plan, with the goal being that of improving overall student achievement and learning outcomes each year and of meeting every Academy’s educational goals.

The Montessori educational model is a specialized teaching method. Teaching staff at our Academies will be required to have appropriate State of Michigan teaching credentials and meet Highly Qualified requirements. In addition, they will be required to present or obtain a full Montessori teacher certification. MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates has partnered with the Center for Guided Montessori Studies to provide a nationally recognized teacher and staff certification program that directly correlates to the model curriculum. Montessori trainers and curriculum experts are also employed through MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates for both

teacher training and curriculum support.

Other local and national Montessori certification programs are recognized as being of high-quality and such are evaluated on a case-to-case basis to determine whether each program's certification process is sufficient to meet the "highly qualified" standards or if additional Montessori training is required by applicants who possess such. To assist in teacher development in the Montessori method of education, all staff who are hired by MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates and who are subsequently enrolled in the year-long Montessori training program are paired with a certified Montessori mentor at either their home Academy (if available), or at one of the Academy's sister schools, with the goal of providing additional support and help in the effective implementation of the Montessori curriculum.

Ongoing staff and Headmaster professional development in the Montessori method of education is the primary focus for mastery of the curriculum as each school grows during its initial years, and as new, non-Montessori certified personnel are hired to work at the Academy. Teachers and assistants will be mentored by fellow staff members and MIChoice's Montessori curriculum specialist(s) as they progress in their teaching skills, and all staff will be required to participate in Academy in-service days, which will be centered on ways to improve the delivery of Montessori education including practical refinements in the lessons presented and taught to the students enrolled. Staff training will also be provided through organized conferences delivered through the MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' consortium of public Montessori schools. Additional opportunities to attend national conferences on Montessori education through organizations such as the American Montessori Society or the International Montessori Council may also be made available. All Montessori Teachers, Assistants and the Headmaster will be enrolled as members of the Michigan Montessori Society, which provides additional state-wide training workshops for members throughout the year, and allows for professional collaboration related to the method, as well as practical help in addressing specific local student needs from instructional peers.

Characteristics of Our Montessori Schools

The primary characteristics of the public Montessori schools operated under the MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates umbrella are:

1. The use of multi-age classrooms, which offers a more natural progression of learning through the childhood years without the barriers of nine-month increments.
2. Each classroom contains developmentally appropriate hands-on Montessori learning materials, which helps children to development abstract concepts based on sequenced concrete experiences.
3. Montessori education teaches instructors to value each child for who they are, and to be mindful of exactly where they are in their personal development. Each Academy's highly qualified instructors acknowledge those strengths and use them to guide the children to greater learning.
4. Because of the good results that come from the Montessori method of differentiated instruction, the public charter Montessori Schools that use the MIChoice/Choice Schools

Associates Montessori Model are recognized as high-achieving schools by educators, parents and on state standardized testing.

A typical school day begins at 8:15 AM and concludes at 3:15 PM and consists of 7 total hours, of which 6 hours and 15 minutes will be instruction related. This equates to 375 instructional minutes per full scheduled day and 1,137 instructional hours per academic year. Students' instructional time will far exceed the state's required instructional time of 1,098 hours. The Academy's Kindergarten will be full day program.

As the Montessori method of education calls for large uninterrupted blocks of work time for staff and students, the Headmaster discourages the scheduling of extracurricular activities during the first half of the school day that would disrupt the morning's educational program. The morning work period in particular is set-aside for Montessori presentations and work time that focuses on core skill instruction so that all students will be able to reach academic proficiency. Minimal interruptions allow for proper focus and gives adequate opportunity for appropriate, standards-based Montessori instruction to occur. The afternoon session has additional blocks of uninterrupted work time, alternating on some days with extracurricular activities such as gym, art, foreign language, or music.

What Assessment Strategies Are Used at the Academies, Both for Individuals and for the Curriculum?

A student's progression through a MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Academy is based on the demonstrated mastery of "on grade level" academic standards found in Montessori checklists, which are integral to the Montessori Foundation Scope and Sequence Curriculum, which is fully aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Individual growth and development of each student is tracked and monitored throughout the year by both the student's teacher and Headmaster, with results being discussed monthly in grade level teaching team meetings. Student assessment data includes individual Academy and state standardized testing and Scantron results, as well as documented progress recorded on the mastery checklists, and narrative format observational records for each student, which is another core assessment strategy found in Montessori education. Teams develop Individual Student Learning Plans (ISLPs) for each student that lists appropriate academic goals and expected achievement levels based on the student's individual ability, core strengths and perceived weaknesses. Results are shared with parents and students through either quarterly or trimester-based report cards and during parent-teacher conferences held twice each year.

In order to determine on-grade level performance and college-readiness levels, academies use the (Scantron) Ed Performance Series assessment three times per year for students in Grades 1-8. Pre-K students are tested at least twice yearly using a teacher-created assessment tool based on the Montessori curriculum, and may also receive the Brigance Assessment. Kindergarten students receive Reading Foundations and Mathematics or AIMSweb testing twice per year, and Grade 1 students take either the AIMSweb or CTBS (Terra Nova) assessment twice yearly. All students in grades 3-8 are administered the state MEAP/SBAC tests, students in Grade 8 take the

ACT Explore assessment, and high school students will take the ACT PLAN, ACT, and other state mandated assessments. The data collected from these and any other standardized testing is disaggregated for regular review in order to determine mastery or confirm the need for additional academic interventions for students.

As each Academy's staff regularly reviews these findings through their teaching teams to make sure students are working at or above grade-level, their discussions and suggestions for each student is used to guide and refine the Individual Student Learning Plans (ISLP). Plans are then used daily by the staff so that each student remains on track to achieve their prescribed learning outcomes. It is the goal that children who enter an Academy performing below grade level will obtain a minimum growth of 1.3 grade levels their first year and, if continually enrolled at the Academy, will meet the College and Career Readiness Growth and Achievement Benchmarks by the end of 3 years. Students who enter an Academy testing at or above grade level will have the goal of a minimum 1-year growth each year. In the event that a student is found to be continuously performing below grade level as identified by staff and through the assessments outlined above, they may be provided MTSS and/or required to participate in the Academy's "Academic Acceleration" program, which provides additional, one-on-one support in core academic subjects. Depending on the individual student's needs, they may also be provided with additional services as prescribed either on their ISLP or through a more formal IEP process, including Title support or other appropriate interventions as suggested by specialists and/or staff members. Teaching teams regularly review and update each student's ISLP, and this ongoing process provides all stakeholders a thorough measurement tool and detailed plan that enables both staff and students to reach individual and overall educational goals at the Academy.

Based on student assessment data, relevant teaching and learning strategies as outlined in the Montessori curriculum are reviewed monthly through both horizontal and vertical teaching teams (or Professional Learning Communities) at each Academy. The Headmaster and staff keep an open dialogue of content areas that students may be struggling with both as a group and as individuals, and make adjustments to their instructional methods to address those areas by either refining the presentations being used, or by seeking additional support materials that are complementary to the Montessori curriculum, in order to help strengthen overall student achievement. This in turn, helps to shape each Academy's yearly School Improvement Plan (SIP) by identifying both the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, and the SIP is used to outline additional strategies to be used to improve student learning and will develop specific instructional objectives for the staff to implement the following school year. Teachers work together to create common assessments that are used to guide improvements in instructional delivery.

What are the Annual Standards of Education that MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates Expect from their Montessori Students?

Standards and measurements of student achievement grow out of Montessori practices and the Michigan accountability system. The Michigan Curriculum Framework is embedded in the MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' Montessori curriculum, and Grade Level Competencies

are identified to ensure that students are prepared for MEAP, or SBAC, assessments, with the goal of all students being scored “proficient” every year. Montessori mastery checklists, formal report cards and learning updates all support this goal by providing teachers, students, and parents with ongoing status reports of student achievement levels for each curriculum area that is being tested.

Students are assessed using Scantron’s Ed Performance Series every fall, mid-year, and end-of-year to determine individual academic progress. As needed, ELL students are assessed with the WIDA assessment. Staff review results as teaching teams to make sure students are on grade-level, and use those results to guide Individual Student Learning Plans (ISLPs). It is anticipated that children who enter the Academy performing at below grade level will have a minimum growth of 1.3 grade levels their first year and, if continually enrolled at the Academy, will meet the College and Career Readiness Growth and Achievement Benchmarks by the end of three years. Students who enter the Academy testing at grade level are expected to show a minimum 1-year growth each year. The ISLPs are regularly used in the classroom during goal-setting meetings that take place between each student and their teacher. During these meetings the student’s individual learning goals are discussed, and the teacher and child work together to establish future academic goals and to discuss what lessons and classroom work will be necessary to be completed towards the achievement of these goals. The review of ISLPs is an important part of staff meetings and is designed to help assess both individual and group student progress. Copies of ISLPs are also kept in each student’s file, and contents and goals are regularly communicated to parents as part of a student’s progress report or report card.

With these targets set, all stakeholders including parents, staff, Board members and students have appropriate testing results shared with them. This includes annual MEAP, or SBAC, results and the three Scantron testing period results, with generalized information being posted on the school’s website (where appropriate) and reviewed by teaching teams twice a year, and individual results being communicated through student report cards sent to parents, progress reports as necessary and parent-teacher conferences. It is MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates’ goal to keep everyone informed of relevant academic progress, so that dialogue can occur early to correct issues that may hold an Academy back from reaching its educational goals, and so that appropriate academic interventions or improvement strategies can be implemented right away with the desired result.

What Other Support Services are Typically Provided at a MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates’ Academy?

Each Academy has the option of offering the following programs and services:

Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP)

Each Academy may provide either a tuition-based or GSRP preschool if grant funding is made available, or both. The Great Start Readiness Program is a state funded preschool program for four-year-old children who are assessed and certified as being at-risk of educational failure in their early years. Parents incur no costs for the program. Research on preschool programs, and

specific research on GSRP, indicates that children who are provided with a high-quality preschool experience show significant positive developmental differences when compared to children from the same backgrounds that did not attend a preschool program. Recent data shows that students who attended GSRP preschool are more likely to graduate than other students.

The Montessori Curriculum is a state accepted curriculum for the GSRP classroom. By providing a tuition-free, Montessori-grounded Pre-K opportunity to at-risk children and their families, enrolled students will be adequately prepared to become successful in Kindergarten, and parents whose children participate will become familiar with both Montessori education and the Academy they attend while their children are still young. It is anticipated that many of these students will enroll in the same Academy's Kindergarten program the following year, as parents build relationships with the school and staff, and want to continue their child's tuition-free Montessori education at the same location.

Employed preschool teachers are required to be both highly qualified and have appropriate Montessori teacher credentials. This allows for a smooth transition from the GSRP Pre-K to an Academy's Kindergarten program. The program is administered by MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' as part of their contract oversight.

Co-curricular Programs

Each Academy is encouraged to support the development of student organizations based on student and parent interest. Teachers will be encouraged to lead a school-related student organization that coincides with their own interests or talents. This could include afterschool clubs or activities such as LEGO robotics, music instruction, Brownies or Cub Scouts, or academic enrichment activities. The goal of any co-curricular program offered will be to enhance the approved curriculum and to provide structured opportunities for students to explore alternative avenues of both learning and social/emotional growth.

Proposals for clubs and afterschool enrichment programs are submitted directly to the Headmaster for discussion with the staff and teaching teams. Criteria for approval by the Headmaster will be based on whether or not the staff determines that the intended program harmonizes with and supports the Academy's vision, mission and educational method of instruction. Implementation of any co-curricular program is at the discretion of the Headmaster. Offering co-curricular enrichment programs is also benefit to many students who have single parents or who live in households where both parents are working full-time, as they may not have been able to participate in afterschool activities previously because of transportation needs. Also, many students living at or below the poverty level would now be able to take part in academic enrichment programs that they would likely not have been able to afford if offered through private institutions or instructors.

Before and After School Care

A program will be provided for both before and after school care for children. Parents pay for these services at a rate that ensures self-sufficiency of the program. Many families have heads of household that work full-time outside of the home. This program is a value-added service for many of these parents who might not be able to drop-off or pick-up their children according to an Academy's school-day schedule. This program may offer tutoring, recreational activities, and a

snack for students. The program will follow the approved school calendar, and will be administered by MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates as part of their contract oversight.

Academic Acceleration

MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates believe that successful student achievement is the primary focus of our instructional staff and that success is directly correlated to programs that identify at-risk students early and provide academic assistance in high-need areas. Besides Multi-Tier System of Supports, Academic Acceleration is one of the programs used for providing assistance, and is a mandatory program for students that are below grade level. For students in grades 3-8, a grade less than C- would constitute below grade level status, and for students in Pre K-2 this will be at the discretion of the teacher. Students will be evaluated every two weeks for Academic Acceleration when determining grade level status.

This program is designed to teach supplemental material to students that are struggling in certain content areas and the highly intensive instructional period will allow teachers to work with individual students on supporting lessons in core subjects. Teachers will use differentiated instruction to reach the students that are struggling. Students that attend Academic Acceleration will be grouped into two subgroups: 1) low motivated and 2) low skill. The focus of the two groups will be very different. The low motivated group will focus on completing missed assignments, and will be taught valuable study skills and work habits that they will carry with them to all future endeavors. These will also be teamed with teacher mentors that will establish a frequent communication cycle to help student(s) with accountability. The low skill group will be placed in smaller settings with fewer students, and more one-to-one instruction will take place.

The implementation of this program is lead by the Principal, and is based upon recommendations for student participation made by the staff-led teaching teams. Funding for the program will be included in the Academy's approved budget.

Service Learning Projects

An integral part of the Montessori curriculum is the establishment of a connection between students and the greater community outside the classroom and school. As such, students may be called on to participate in community service projects at home, school and in the community through strategic partnerships developed by each Academy's staff and Headmaster.

Is Montessori Education Appropriate for Students with Special Needs?

In accordance with state law, each Academy offers a full range of services for students with special needs, including those found eligible for special education support through either an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or for accommodations required through a 504 Plan, or for individuals who are English Language Learners (ELL). Academy's provide Highly Qualified state certified special education teachers, and other required support services as needed, to fulfill IEP or 504 Plan requirements. Students whose home language is not English are given assistance through various means, which may include native language instructors, in order to allow them to participate fully in their Montessori classroom. Any and all services are provided in the least

restrictive environment most conducive to student learning that is consistent with federal and state regulations governing special education, reflecting the value MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates places on diversity and inclusion.

Parents must decide for themselves what environment is best for the education of their own individual child. While no educational model is right for all children, the Montessori method of learning and educational model are particularly favorable to meeting the requirements of special needs students with minimal pullout or segregated services. Studies such as “The Circle of Inclusion Project, University of Kansas (2002),” recognize the success of this approach in connection with students who may have an IEP or 504 Plan. The study notes that, “the Montessori method has its earliest roots in special education and compensatory early childhood education.” Its founder and creator, Maria Montessori, believed that all children are intrinsically motivated to learn and that they will readily absorb knowledge when provided with prepared environments and specialized learning materials at appropriate times of development.

Listed below are ten specific aspects of the Montessori approach that have a direct link to special education, with explanations as to how each of these naturally meet the needs of young children with disabilities within the traditional Montessori classroom. This information has been taken from the article that is referenced at the end of this section, and the material has been abridged for inclusion in this application.

1. The advantages inherent in the use of mixed age groups. Mixed age groupings found within a Montessori classroom are conducive to a successful inclusion experience for special needs students. Mixed age groups within a classroom necessitate a wide and complete range of materials, which are used to meet the individual needs of children and not the average need of the group. Mixed age groups contribute to the development of a caring community of learners, and sets up the expectation of peer mentoring. Additionally, children often stay with the same teacher for several years in a row, which allows the teacher a longer period of time to understand and work with the child’s developmental level, learning style and family support system.

2. The provisions for individualization for each child within the context of a supportive classroom community. The individualized curriculum in a Montessori classroom is compatible with the individualization required for children with disabilities. Each child is able to move through material sequences at his or her own pace, and the philosophy stresses personal demonstrations of each lesson. Work in a Montessori classroom is introduced to a child based on developmental readiness rather than chronological age. When a child with a disability works on an individual need or skill that is very different from that of his or her peers, he or she is not set apart as different or excluded from the classroom.

3. The emphasis on functionality within the Montessori environment. Montessori materials are real objects rather than “toy” replicas whenever possible (i.e., children cut bread with a real knife, sweep crumbs with a broom and dry wet tables with cloths). In a Montessori classroom, the primary goal is to prepare children for life. The field of special education often focuses on the development of functional skills, defined as those that effect the actual survival or physical well-being of an individual, and that influence a student’s ability to perform as independently and as productively as possible at home, school and in the community. The practical life area found in a

Montessori classroom teaches numerous skills that fall within this category.

4. The development of independence and the ability to make choices. Research has shown that the more severe a child's disability, the fewer opportunities they experience in making meaningful choices in their daily life (Guess, Benson and Siegel-Causey, 1985). Montessori classrooms allow children with disabilities to make these types of choices every day, and in turn become more independent learners. All children in a Montessori classroom may choose to work with any materials that the teacher has given them a lesson on previously. This means that children with disabilities are afforded the same opportunities to choose materials to work with as their typically developing peers on a daily basis.

5. The development of organized work patterns in children. One objective of the practical life area in a Montessori classroom is the development of organized work habits. This component is an essential part of the teachers' demonstrations, as they present to children in logical order how to use the materials found within that area of the classroom. Children with disabilities that have a critical need to learn organizational and time management skills benefit greatly from this type of step-by-step instruction.

6. The value of the classical Montessori demonstration. A demonstration by a Montessori teacher is precise, orderly, uses a minimum of language that is selected specifically for its relevance to the activity and emphasizes a logical progression of the task from beginning to end. An equivalent to these precise demonstrations in the field of special education is task analysis or discrete behavioral steps in an instructional chain leading to acquisition of a skill.

7. The emphasis on and value of repetition within the Montessori environment. Children with special needs typically require lots of practice and may make progress towards educational goals in small increments. The Montessori philosophy recognizes that the amount of repetition needed varies from child to child and skill to skill. Therefore, flexibility in the amount of practice needed for each child and each skill occurs daily for all students.

8. Many Montessori materials have a built-in control of error. Materials that have a built-in control of error benefit children with disabilities in the same way they do all children in a Montessori classroom. Because errors are obvious, children notice and correct them without the help of a teacher. Self-corrected errors are less likely to recur than errors that must be teacher corrected. Additionally, self-corrected errors provide the child with internal, rather than external (teacher) reinforcement.

9. Many academic materials provide the child with concrete representations of the abstract. For children with disabilities, the use of concrete materials and manipulatives is critical to promoting real learning. Montessori classrooms offer a wide range of concrete representations that children use and handle as a regular part of the curriculum. For example, the teen numbers are introduced to children concretely through the use of a golden ten-bead bar and unit bead bars of 1-9. (Therefore, 11 is represented by 10 and 1.)

10. Materials found within the sensorial area of the classroom are designed to develop and organize incoming sensory perceptions. Montessori education includes sensorial materials that develop and refine each sense in isolation, as all other qualities of the materials are neutralized to

focus on the one sense. For example, the pink tower is a set of ten pink cubes of increasing size that are all the same color and shape, with a focus on only visual discriminatory skills as the child orders the cubes. The importance of the sensorial materials in a Montessori classroom for children with sensory deficits is tremendous. The child who cannot see, for example, will benefit from the many materials that train and refine the senses of touch, hearing, smell, etc.

[Material excerpted from Guess, D., Benson, H.A., & Siegel-Causey, E. (1985). Concepts and issues related to choice making and autonomy among persons with severe disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 10, (2), 79-86.]

Montessori education is an individualized approach that meets each student at his/her own level, thus maximizing the potential for learning that each student has. However, when there are individual cases of a student whose needs cannot be fully met within a traditional Montessori classroom setting, an Academy will work closely with the Educational Service Provider's Special Education team to develop an IEP or 504 Plan for that student based on both teacher observations and appropriate evaluations by professionals in the field. The Academy will then provide such services as dictated for that student based on their IEP. This might include additional Academy-contracted or ISD provided specialists such as speech or occupational therapists, Title I teachers, social workers, reading or math support personnel or personal aides for students who require assistance. Parents' rights under the law will be honored during this process and free appropriated education will be provided in accordance with Federal and State mandates.

In addition to individual Academy-based services, an Academy's Intermediate School District often gives staff access to specialized support services that cover a wide variety of needs for special education eligible students. Services may range from assistance to students within their own classrooms to enrollment in special schools and programs offered within the district. Each Academy's staff will work closely together with their local ISD to ensure that all students with special needs, IEPs or ELL designations enrolled in the Academy receive the best possible support services available.

What Makes MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates Public Montessori Academies a Sought-Out Form of Education?

Montessori programs are known to have strong enrollment retention as the structure of the model, which includes the Montessori teaching methods, multiage classrooms, differentiated instruction, and experiential learning, which keeps students actively engaged in the academic process. As students grow along with their same teacher over a two or three-year period, each multi-age classroom tends to become its own Montessori "family", and students and parents have a true sense of belonging to their Academy's community. In Montessori education growth occurs naturally because of its "spiral curriculum," which allows students to build upon the knowledge gained in their previous year to expand their current learning experience. The curriculum maximizes retention and has a built-in progression because of Montessori's whole learning method. Each Academy's growth is due to the natural academic attainment inherent within the

curriculum and the age progression of the student body.

Statistically speaking, the choice made to enroll their children in a public charter Montessori Academy is particularly appealing to parents and guardians who:

- Believe their child will excel in an educational setting that is grounded in the belief that children have a dynamic inner desire to explore and learn about their environment.
- Believe that education should prepare their children for life – intellectually, emotionally, and physically.
- Want a high quality and rigorous educational experience that will prepare their student for a smooth and accelerated transition into High School.
- Want a safe environment for their child that doesn't just offer, but creates and models character, proper etiquette, and respect.

Each Academy is encouraged to offer both a tuition paid preschool and a state funded Great Start Readiness Program for children ages 4-5. By introducing families to Montessori learning and practices from the outset of the child's educational experience, many families choose to enroll their children in the Academy beginning their Kindergarten year. The value-added service of before and afterschool childcare options and academic intervention services help with student retention by directly benefitting families, especially those who may not be able to pick up or drop off their children according to the traditional school-day time schedule.

Each Academy will employ numerous early intervention strategies, including Multi Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and a child study process that will insure all students are able to find a pathway to completion of their academic goals and achieve alongside their peers. MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates will make available consultants in the areas of social work and speech therapy to help identify early those students who may have challenges that could prevent them from achieving and apply interventions. Each Academy will install an Academic Acceleration program afterschool for all students who are below grade level as determined by their teachers with formative assessments. These interventions are in place to prevent students from falling behind and losing pace with their peers and from not achieving their academic goals.

How Do You Inform Families About Your Schools?

MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates realizes that families need to be able to make an informed choice when it comes to their child's education. Our goal is to make sure that all parents and guardians who choose to enroll at our Academies are well-informed concerning the school's curriculum, learning strategies and instructional model.

When a school is chartered, MIChoice Public Montessori Charter School model's initial advertising and recruitment plan focuses on the following marketing messages:

- A tuition-free Montessori education
- Fully equipped classrooms with hands-on Montessori materials
- Highly qualified, Montessori-trained teachers and instructional assistants
- A high-quality Montessori Education Program which prepares children for the future

- Character development and a safe, secure learning environment
- A Montessori Pre-Kindergarten Program, offering free GSRP preschool

Core marketing strategies include:

- The use of social media to inform the community about the Academy and keep interested families up to date on progress, current happenings and school events
- School website kept up-to-date with current information
- Local newspaper and magazine advertising, including online community newspapers
- Academy outreach to the local neighborhood, offering free family events at the school
- Attendance and participation in other community events such as parades or art shows
- Regular school tours/play dates/open houses with both the Headmaster and staff
- Literature provided to daycare centers, local Montessori preschools, and sent via direct mail

Once an Academy opens, a yearly communications plan is developed to make sure that growth and retention are addressed and revised as necessary. To assist in strengthening the plan, each Academy forms a Communications Committee to help review marketing strategies, including those listed above, and what, if any, changes need to be made for the upcoming school year based on both current enrollment and future growth projections.

What is the Enrollment Policy for MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates Charter Schools?

Following is the our recommended Enrollment and Admissions Policy that meets both Federal and State requirements, as provided by the National Charter School's Institute. Each individual Academy Board must review and then vote to adopt this policy.

Application and Enrollment Policy and Criteria

The following draft, aligned with state law, will be followed. The Academy will annually adopt maximum enrollment figures prior to its application and enrollment period.

Policy:

The Academy will neither charge tuition nor discriminate in pupil admissions policies or practices on the basis of intellectual or athletic ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, status as a handicapped person, or any other basis that would be illegal if used by a Michigan public school district.

1. Enrollment will be open to all individuals who reside in Michigan. Except for a foreign exchange student who is not a United States citizen, the Academy will not enroll a pupil who is not a Michigan resident.
2. Admissions may be limited to pupils within a particular age range/grade level or on any other basis that would be legal if used by a Michigan public school district.
3. The Academy Board may establish a policy providing enrollment priority to siblings of currently enrolled pupils. However, the Academy may not provide a preference to children of Academy Board members or Academy employees.
4. The Academy will allow any pupil who was enrolled in the immediately preceding academic year to re-enroll in the appropriate age range/grade level unless that grade is not offered.

5. No student may be denied participation in the application process due to lack of student records.
6. If the Academy receives more applications for enrollment than there are spaces available, pupils will be selected for enrollment through a random selection drawing.

Application Process

1. The application period will be a minimum of two weeks in duration, with evening and/or weekend times available.
2. The Academy will accept applications all year. If openings occur during the academic year, students will be admitted according to the official waiting list. The position on the waiting list will be determined by the random selection drawing. If there is no waiting list, students will be admitted on a first-come, first-served basis.
3. The Academy may neither close the application period nor hold a random selection drawing for unauthorized grades prior to receipt of written approval from the PSA Office.

Legal Notice

1. The Academy will provide legal notice of the application and enrollment process in a local newspaper of general circulation. A copy of the legal notice will be forwarded to the PSA Office.
2. The legal notice will include:
 - A. The process and/or location(s) for requesting and submitting applications.
 - B. The beginning date and the ending date of the application period.
 - C. The date, time and place the random selection drawing(s) will be held, if needed.
3. The legal notice of the application period will be designed to inform individuals that are most likely to be interested in attending the Public School Academy.
4. The Academy, being an equal opportunity educational institution, will be committed to good-faith affirmative action efforts to seek out, create and serve a diverse student body.

Re-enrolling Students

1. The Academy will notify parents or guardians of all enrolled students of the deadline for notifying the Academy that they wish to re-enroll their child.
2. Siblings of current students will have preference; therefore, the re-enrollment notice must also request that the parent or guardian indicate whether a sibling(s) seeks to enroll for the upcoming academic year.
3. An enrolled student who does not re-enroll by the specified date can only apply to the Academy during the application period for new students.
4. An applicant on the waiting list at the time a new application period begins must re-apply as a new student.
5. After collecting the parent or guardian responses, the Academy will determine the following:
 - A. The number of students who have re-enrolled per grade or grouping level.
 - B. The number of siblings seeking admission for the upcoming academic year per grade.
 - C. If space is unavailable, the Public School Academy must develop a waiting list for siblings of re-enrolled students.
 - D. The number of spaces remaining, per grade, after enrollment of current students and siblings.

Random Selection Drawing: A random selection drawing will be required if the number of applications exceeds the number of available spaces. Prior to the application period, the Academy will:

1. Establish written procedures for conducting a random selection drawing.
2. Establish the maximum number of spaces available per grade or grouping level.
3. Establish the date, time, place and person to conduct the random selection drawing.
4. Notify the PSA Office of both the application period and the date of the random selection drawing, if needed. The PSA Office may have a representative on-site to monitor the random selection drawing process.

The Academy will use a credible, neutral “third party” such as a CPA firm, government official, ISD official or civic leader to conduct the random selection drawing. Further, the Academy will:

1. Conduct the random selection drawing at a public meeting where parents, community members and the public may observe the process.
2. Use numbers, letters, or another system that guarantees fairness and does not give an advantage to any applicant.

The Academy will notify applicants not chosen in the random selection drawing that they were not selected and that their name has been placed on the Academy’s official waiting list for openings that may occur during the academic year. Students will appear on the official waiting list in the order they were selected in the random selection drawing.

What Role Do Parents Play in the Montessori Schools Operated by MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates?

Once a child is enrolled at a MIChoice/Choice Schools Academy, parents are encouraged to participate in their child’s learning experiences through classroom visitations and volunteering. Research supports and indicates that involving parents directly impacts student achievement, improves school-home and family relationships, and builds strong partnerships within the community (Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. 2002). As a Montessori approach may differ from the educational experience familiar to parents, the Academy will continuously work with its parents to keep them informed on the philosophy and essential characteristics of the Montessori program (Levine, 2000; Harris, 2004; Lillard, 2005). Educational opportunities for parents through curriculum nights help to explain and reinforce the lessons and instructional approach used at the Academy, and foster further opportunities for understanding and communication.

Parent demand for better choices in educating children in the area is what drives the creation of our schools. Consistent with the Montessori model of education, each Academy actively involves parents in their child’s education through the creation and implementation of a parent-led Academy organization known as a PEP, or Parent Engagement Program. The Headmaster works with a team of parents to coordinate a formal Parent Engagement Program (PEP). All parents/guardians are automatically members, and parent facilitators lead four engagement committees: Academics, Events, Facility, and Fund-Raising. Facilitators seek to engage other parents with the group that connects to their interests.

PEP Committees:

1. The Academic Support Committee supports activities occurring in the classroom. They also organize and plan other activities that provide supplemental education.
2. The Academy Events Committee helps manage the student events calendar and parent communications. Members plan and run school events and draft a parent newsletter.
3. The Facility Beautification Committee serves as a supplement for improvement projects at the Academy. Projects may include those that enhance the appearance of the Academy.
4. The Fundraising Committee determines the annual fundraising goals and plan and operate fundraising events. Fundraisers will be used to enhance student programs and classrooms.

Each family (consisting of parents and/or guardians) is encouraged to devote a minimum of 15 hours per school year in volunteer opportunities at the school. Additionally, each Academy directly involves all parents and guardians in their child's education through regular correspondence by letters and notes (either hand-written or via email), phone calls, scheduled parent conferences and parent education nights. Each of these methods will focus on creating a meaningful two-way dialogue, which is directly related to both the student's educational and emotional growth. The Power Parenting University program (www.powerparentingu.com) is often implemented to help increase parent and guardian connections to both their own student and to the Academy.

To establish an effective home/school partnership and be in compliance with Section 1118 of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, every Academy must provide the following:

- Annual Title I Meeting with parents in September of each school year, and confirms that the LEA has assisted the school in the planning and implementing of the parental involvement activities.
- Meetings/Activities during the school year that will provide training to parents on how they can support learning at home.
- Parent surveys will be provided to gather opinions and concerns about student achievement and concerns. Results will be used to evaluate school programs.
- MEAP and educational assessment reports will be provided to parents.
- Parents are invited to assist in the classroom with fundraisers, field trips, and other events planned in the school and community.
- Academy teachers will make an effort to communicate with parents in a format and language that is easily understood and free of educational jargon. They will communicate through frequent flyers, monthly calendars, classroom newsletters, breakfast and lunch menus.

In addition, a published Parent Involvement plan is jointly created by each Academy's staff and parents based on the Joyce Epstein model for parental involvement. MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates believes that a child's education is a responsibility shared by the school and their family. Research has demonstrated that when parents are engaged in their children's education, they get better grades and test scores, have better attitudes and behavior, complete more homework, and are more likely to complete high school and enroll in post high school education.

How Does MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates Implement the Michigan School Improvement Framework (SIF) Objectives in their Model Montessori Schools?

Each Academy's Headmaster and staff collect the following data to inform and instruct their Professional Learning Communities along the five strands of the School Improvement Framework as detailed below. Data collected helps to shape each Academy's yearly School Improvement Plan, and regular review of this data in staff and School Board meetings helps to determine the achievement of specific goals. The MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates' plan for this effort was developed from sources listed in the Reference section of this document.

Strand I – Teaching for Learning

Standard 1: Curriculum – Curriculum Alignment & Curriculum Communicated

- The Montessori curriculum's scope and sequence documents will be provided to every staff member and are reviewed in the staff's professional teaching team meetings to determine the curriculums' effectiveness in direct relation to student learning outcomes and assessment data.
- Content analysis of the curriculum in key subject areas will regularly be reported and discussed with teaching teams to ensure each of the Michigan Curriculum Framework's GLCEs are covered. The Montessori curriculum team regularly updates, and aligns, Montessori lessons, so changes in the GLCEs and benchmarks are immediately given to staff.
- Development activities related to the curriculum will be recorded and kept on file.
- A count of the number of communications made directly to parents as related to the curriculum will be kept to determine the frequency and its overall effectiveness.

Standard 2: Instruction – Planning & Delivery

- Lesson plans contained in the Montessori curriculum will be matched to the state benchmark standards. This will provide a structure for instruction planning that is available to all staff that follows state standards. Periodic review of current lesson plans as correlated to state and common core standards will occur as part of teaching team meetings.
- Data of student performance taken from the various assessments given at the Academy in each core subject will be used to determine whether instruction and delivery is effective.
- Each student's assessment data will be recorded on their own individual student learning plan, and specific goals will be discussed and recorded for students so that they will be able to reach appropriate academic benchmarks via informed data decisions.
- Classroom observation data will also be used for instructional delivery improvement. This will include data from informal walkthroughs, formal observations of staff using the Framework for Teaching rubric, and the Montessori teacher's observational records of student proficiency of classroom lessons and materials.

Standard 3: Assessment – Aligned to Curriculum and Instruction & Data Report and Use

- Data collected using various assessment strategies will be used to determine whether or not the curriculum is aligned properly to help students reach academic proficiency.
- Assessment results will be shared on a regular basis with teachers, students, and parents, so as to keep them informed of individual and group student progress and the achievement level of the Academy's academic and educational goals.

- An assessment-reporting schedule will be compiled for the school year, and anticipated data that is gleaned from each assessment will be listed to determine what, if any, gaps might exist in the body of assessments being used at the Academy.

Strand II – Leadership

Standard 1: Instructional Leadership – Educational Program & Instructional Support

- A yearly review by the ESP of the Headmaster will be conducted to assess their knowledge of various areas of the educational program such as student learning outcomes, the curriculum, current instructional strategies, familiarity with the assessment instruments, and the use of data to identify and respond to achievement gaps will be conducted.
- Various data including the outcomes of improvements made according to the School Improvement Plan, students’ marking period grades, Academy drop out rates, and parent and staff satisfaction surveys will be used in conjunction with this yearly review to establish whether or not instructional support is occurring at the Headmaster level.
- Staff will be given adequate time and opportunity to collaborate on the use of the educational program during their PLC meetings. Minutes and records of these meetings will be kept on file for review, and will be used to identify additional ways in which the Headmaster can better support staff in the delivery of the curriculum.

Standard 2: Shared Leadership – School Culture and Climate & Continuous Improvement

- Assessment of the school culture and climate determination will include data collected on the number of school suspensions or expulsions, the nature of disciplinary referrals, and parent, student and staff satisfaction surveys.
- Weekly PLC meetings will encourage the development of a positive staff culture, with sufficient time provided to collaboratively discuss and record school improvement strategies, the fulfillment of educational goals and how to best live the school’s mission and vision.
- Every year a content analysis of the three most recent, consecutive years of School Improvement Plans will be conducted to see if plans were clear on a shared vision and mission, were results-focused, were properly implemented and monitored, and if there was a continuation of measurable improvement.

Standard 3: Operational & Resource Management – Resource Allocation & Operational Management

- The Academy’s budget will be in harmony with the mission and vision of the school. A line item analysis of the school budget will be made annually to determine to what degree fiscal resources are providing equitable support for teaching and learning needs.
- A content analysis review will be made yearly to determine if adequate human resources, time and space are allocated to support the school improvement goals as outlined in the School Improvement Plan.
- A yearly review of student handbooks will be made to check for compliance/alignment with the requirements that are detailed in the Board Policy binder.
- A Yearly Compliance report will be reviewed to determine the degree to which the school meets state and federal regulations.

Strand III – Personnel and Professional Learning

Standard 1: Personnel Qualifications – Requirements, Skills Knowledge and Dispositions

- Staff will be “highly qualified” as identified by both state and ESP standards, and classroom instructors will be required to provide appropriate professional credentials and a recognized Montessori certification document as outlined in their job description.
- Copies of recruitment listings, selection materials for positions, and human resource procedures (including reference checks, criminal background checks, etc.) will be kept on file.
- Teacher Evaluation data will be collected via a Board and state-approved document, and will be kept on file with the ESP, with the results shared with the Headmaster.
- A professional development schedule will be implemented that allows all staff to regularly improve upon their skills and knowledge, and peer mentoring will be a normal part of the school day through both individualized assignments and teaching team meetings.
- Staff professional learning communities will meet on a regular basis, with agendas, minutes and outcomes reported and kept on file.

Standard 2: Professional Development – Collaboration, Content & Pedagogy and Alignment

- District professional development policies and records of professional development will be kept for all staff members.
- Online or in-person training opportunities that lead to Montessori certification, local and national conference participation, and working alongside classroom mentors will assist staff in properly instituting the Montessori model of education. All Montessori-specific professional development will also be recorded on individual staff records.
- Staff members will keep agendas, handouts, and participant evaluations from professional development opportunities on file for reference and review.

Strand IV – School and Community Relations

Standard 1: Parent and Family Involvement – Communication & Engagement

- Parents and students will be informed on a regular basis of student progress and individual achievement of student learning plan goals. This may be through one-on-one meetings, emails, report cards or during student conferences, and will be noted in the student’s record.
- Data containing both the demographics and participation levels of parents who volunteer at the school will be kept to determine the level of family involvement.
- Yearly parent satisfaction surveys will be collected to engage parents in the school improvement process and to determine the efficacy of communications.

Standard 2: Community Involvement – Communication & Engagement

- School Board members will ideally be local members with a wide variety of backgrounds, so that the Board has a well-rounded representation from the community it serves.
- Community engagement will be encouraged through press releases, news articles, social networking and events or community-based activities that may occur periodically at the school. Attendance numbers and documented interest will be kept on file.
- As community service is an important part of the educational model, student participation and projects will be tracked at the school level and reported on when appropriate in local news outlets or through community newsletters.
- A needs-based assessment on the characteristics and trends evident in the school community will be made yearly, with the goal of addressing diversity and reaching out to people that may be interested in superior education, even if they do not have children enrolled in the school.

Strand V – Data and Information Management

Standard 1: Data Management – Data Generation, Identification, and Collection, Data Accessibility & Data Support

- Data collection at the Academy will occur on a regular basis, and include information such as that gleaned from enrollment forms, attendance records, student count days, special education assessments, annual and Academy-based testing results, and any other data required to be kept on file based on Authorizer, local, state and Federal mandates.
- The Headmaster will be responsible for the overall collection, analysis and oversight of all data reported. Where permitted by law, the data will be used in informing teaching team meetings, parents, students and the School Board as to school issues and achievement of goals, and may be posted if appropriate via the school’s transparency reporting tab on its website.
- Sensitive or privacy protected data will be subject to all confidentiality laws, and specific requests for any data must be made according to FOIA guidelines, and will only be permitted for release when allowed by law.
- A yearly review will occur via the School Improvement Process to analyze the stream of information released, and to determine to what degree data is readily accessible to parents and teachers, how well the data is organized and summarized, to what extent data shows adequate comparisons across groups and over time, and if the collected data allows staff to monitor progress and make timely instructional decisions.

Standard 2: Information Management – Analysis and Interpretation & Application

- The staff and Headmaster will be trained to interpret data gleaned from assessments and all data reporting at the Academy, and will work to develop appropriate reporting tools that are easy to understand and allow easy access to relevant information.
- Individual Student Learning Plans will drive the Academy’s educational model, and will be used as the basis of discussion in staff teaching team meetings and also by teachers within the classroom. Each students’ ISLP will be reviewed in these meetings and analyzed on a continual basis to make sure targeted academic outcomes are being met for every student.
- The School Improvement Plan will be developed with a focus on the use of a wide variety of data during the planning process, so that informed improvement will occur school-wide and targeted outcomes and implementation strategies are formulated that are in direct harmony with the reported data.

What are the Roles of the Authorizer, Charter School Board and Educational Service Provider?

A charter school Authorizer is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that its authorized schools are in compliance with all applicable laws. The authorizer appoints the Academy Board members and issues the Charter Contract. Beyond that initial responsibility, the authorizer continues to play a critical role in upholding, for those schools it authorizes, high standards of academic performance for all children as well as standards for uncompromising integrity in all areas of operation. The authorizer is also a critical partner and support to its academies; providing news alerts, information, research, and assessment tools to encourage a ‘best practice’

approach among authorized academies. The authorizer-appointed Academy Board should hold a mutually respectful relationship with its authorizer, accepting observations and feedback in the spirit of continuous improvement. The approved Board must work diligently to embrace a relationship of transparency, integrity, and open communication, working cooperatively with its authorizer to provide information that is accurate and timely.

The Academy Board recognizes the importance of fulfilling their leadership role in overseeing the Academy. In order to receive appropriate Board training and support, MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates School Boards often contract with the National Charter Schools Institute and The Montessori Foundation to provide Board Governance Training and for the development of the Academy's Board Policies. In addition, Boards are encouraged to build relationships with other nearby Montessori public school Boards under its ESP's umbrella or operations, in order to gain additional knowledge and understanding of the unique needs and requirements that are necessary for Board members to possess in performing their duties as a Director of a Montessori public charter school. This relationship is possible under the Board's management contract with MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates, as this ESP sets up and provided numerous networking and training opportunities for its contracted Montessori School Boards.

The Academy Board swears to serve as a policy-making body responsible for upholding the Academy's educational goals, vision and mission as outlined in the charter contract. As such, the Board of Directors is charged with fiscal responsibilities such as creating a yearly budget and revising it on a periodic basis in response to Academy needs, and also the management of the business and property affairs of the Academy, including the oversight of grant funding and budgeting. They must also be faithful stewards of the charter school contract with their authorizer, and must make fact-based data-informed decisions about the school operations and academic achievement to ensure that the management company is working in harmony with the Board's desires and authorizer contract by properly implementing the curriculum and instructional methods that were agreed upon

The Educational Service Provider (ESP) helps the Academy Board effectively operate the charter school, while fully honoring and respecting the school's mission and core educational philosophy and contract with its Authorizer. MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates brings an established partnership with the Montessori Foundation to its schools, and recently signed a contract with the Center for Guided Montessori Studies to offer a certified training program for Montessori teacher certification, and as such will provide certified staffing services to the Academy's Board. In addition, MIChoice is contracted directly by the Board to handle both the daily financial management and fiscal budgeting of each Academy.

The school's Headmaster will be a highly qualified employee hired by the ESP, which is leased back to the Academy Board. MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates is responsible for the recruitment process of the Academy's Headmaster, and conducts all interviews along with proper background/credential checks before bringing potential candidates for the position to the Academy Board for final approval. The Headmaster then takes over the oversight of the day-to-day operations of the school, working in conjunction with the Educational Service Provider under the direction of both the Board's policies and yearly budget to ensure that staff and operations are in line with the educational program components and goals outlined in the charter school contract. Staff at the Academy are also employees of the management company that are

leased back to the Academy, and all faculty operate under the direct oversight of both the Headmaster and Educational Service Provider (ESP).

MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates will be contracted through a management agreement made by the Board of Directors. The ESP will oversee the daily business operations of the Academy, including hiring the proper staff, and will make sure that the program that is put in place is in harmony with what has been written in the charter contract. The ESP will be responsible for the overall performance of the Academy, both academically and fiscally, and will be accountable to the Academy Board of Directors. MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates provides its contracted school with a Contract Oversight person that works directly with the Headmaster. The company's management resources support the Academy in all areas of management and educational programming.

Choice Schools Associates is a highly recommended Michigan based educational service provider, which currently operates nine charter schools through five different authorizers in the State of Michigan. Each of these academies differ in theme and mission but all comply with curricular standards, offer best practices, promote teacher effectiveness, have stable operations and strong fund balances, and promote effective and ethical leadership practices. For over 15 years, they have acted as a "turn-around" organization for several charter schools, and have successfully improved the financial status of many of these schools. Its subsidiary, MIChoice, LLC, was created to help service the specialized needs of charter school start-ups. Both companies work together to share expertise and resources that are needed in managing both turnaround and startup charter schools across the state of Michigan.

Both MIChoice and Choice Schools Associates strive to meet three fundamental and unchanging standards at each of their contracted schools: significantly improve students' academic achievement, delight parents and ensure high levels of satisfaction and create a safe, secure learning environment. MIChoice's unique educational paradigm supports and encourages the achievement of the aforementioned standards. Their Montessori public school model relies upon the following principles and practices:

- Montessori Partnership with the Montessori Foundation and the Center for Guided Montessori Studies for Training and Curriculum Alignment with Michigan Curriculum Framework/Common Core State Standards
- Academy Partnership with MIChoice/Choice Schools Managed Montessori Schools
- Learning Centered School Culture
- No social promotion (Prisoner's of Time, USDoE publication, 1995)
- Traditional discipline practices

What Does it Cost to Start a Public School Academy?

Prior to receiving the initial state aid payment on October 20, a new Academy will incur substantial costs to setup and operate the school. Even though the Michigan Finance Authority (MFA) provides state aid notes (or bridge loans) to assist public school academies in managing their cash flow at the beginning of the school year, they do not provide a note to first year

academies due to lack of enrollment and financial history along with general uncertainty on the academy’s ability to operate. MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates has experience in securing state aid notes directly through financial institutions and outside investors with MFA competitive interest rates with a recorded vote and written approval by the Academy Board.

MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates encourages each of its new Academies to apply for the Michigan Department of Education’s (MDE) Planning & Implementation Grants. These grant funds, if available, will be allocated to provide financial support for such things as: securing classroom equipment and instructional materials, providing high quality professional development, developing and maintaining a professional website and marketing plan, and recruiting and training a highly qualified staff. In addition, Boards will budget conservatively in its initial years of operations until student enrollment trends are established. Should revenues be lower than the estimated budget, the Board will amend its budget to adjust spending accordingly and in a manner that will preserve the Montessori based educational program. The Board’s partnership with MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates, a management company with a proven history of financial operations and lender relations, will be beneficial should budget issues arise.

Budget assumptions must include:

- Student to teacher ratios for Montessori classrooms
- Support staffing for Administration, Food Service, and other selected services
- Competitive compensation packages with benefits not to exceed 25-30% of salary costs
- Total facility expenses including purchase, lease, utilities, maintenance, insurance, and custodial not to exceed 20% of state aid
- Special education services to meet student IEP requirements
- High quality professional development
- Instructional supplies, materials and technology
- Marketing plan
- Employee recruitment

Each Academy fully anticipates operating with the following supplemental financial resources:

- Title I, Part A (federal grant) – Help disadvantaged children meet high academic standards by providing supplemental instruction in the core academic curriculum standards
- Title II, Part A (federal grant) – Provide high quality, research based, professional development to instructional staff and school leadership
- Great Start Readiness Program (state grant) – Provide an instructional program to preschool age students which will better prepare them for kindergarten
- 31A At-Risk (state grant) – Help students meeting the at-risk criteria with providing supplemental instructional and pupil support services

Academy Boards must fully understand all federal and state compliance requirements that must be maintained while operating with these grants. This includes, but is not limited to, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) circulars and U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) issued EDGAR (Education Department General Administrative Regulations) book.

A typical start-up budget for a public school Academy is as follows:

Loans \$500,000

Charter School Planning Grant	\$100,000	
TOTAL REVENUE		\$600,000
Legal Fees	\$8,000	
Accounting and Consultation Fees	\$40,000	
Filing Fees	\$1,000	
Marketing	\$40,000	
Rent	\$72,000	
Supplies	\$33,000	
Utilities	\$12,000	
Labor	\$10,000	
Facility Preparation	\$140,000	
Staff Professional Development	\$100,000	
TOTAL EXPENSES		(\$456,000)

What does a Typical Montessori Public School Facility Look Like?

Based on past experience in both the opening and operation of MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates’ seven other Montessori charter schools, the following features have been identified that an ideal facility for a public Montessori school should include:

- An approximately 60,000 square foot building with enough surrounding land for adequate parking and play areas, with the capacity for future expansion to 72,000+ sq. ft.
- 25 classrooms; 23 for general education classes and two for special education resource rooms
- Media center with print materials, instructional software and technology
- Administrative offices for the Headmaster, Assistant Headmaster (when enrollment exceeds 400 students), Director of Title I Instructional Services (if needed) and two secretaries
- Gymnasium/cafeteria/stage with a small food-prep kitchen
- Faculty lounge and custodial maintenance area
- Restrooms located throughout the building, in accordance with state requirements
- Fully handicap accessible

MIChoice/Choice Schools Associates has a proven track record of not only being able to acquire suitable public school facilities for charter organizations, but also in being able to successfully obtain a Certificate of Occupancy for the facility’s use as a public school building in time for its opening date. The company provides full oversight of facility renovations, including contracting with experts to make sure necessary construction is completed within an appropriate time frame, coordinating and ensuring the completion of all state and local building inspections, and researching and implementing basic school operational systems such as food service, transportation, and technology.

Why is Montessori Education so Vital Today?

Montessori education is a proven methodology for reaching children at all levels of mastery. It will make the difference in the lives of our students – a difference that will impact their readiness for further study, professional success, future fulfillment of family lives and participation in the greater community as global citizens.

We can say this with confidence, as research continues to prove the benefits of Montessori education, and recent studies provide fact-based evidence that children educated using the Montessori method have higher achievement levels on standardized testing, as well as improved social and life skills which they carry throughout their lives. The Academy expects these same types of results. It also has the added benefit of Montessori “sister schools” under the same management organization. These charter Montessori schools have worked hard to promote the benefits of Montessori education throughout the state of Michigan, and have offered both their support and resources to the Academy to help solidify its success. Working in partnership, these schools expect to comprise a network of Montessori learning and curriculum refinement, and in turn will be recognized as exemplary centers of Montessori education across the nation.

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