

Family Connection

SEPTEMBER 2026



The Family-Teacher Partnership How Families and Schools Work Together

BY CASSI MACKEY

When parents/caregivers drop their child off at school each morning, they are not just handing over their most precious gift but years of intimate knowledge: this child's fears, joys, interests, and quirks. A Montessori teacher receives that handoff with respect and care. That exchange is understood to be a sacred moment; it is a physical representation of their partnership.

Montessori education holds a clear conviction that children thrive when the adults in their lives are working together. Maria Montessori herself wrote that the family and the school must be united around the child, not operating in parallel, but in active partnership. What does that look like in practice?

Two Sets of Experts

A Montessori teacher spends hours observing children at work, noticing how a child approaches a challenge, what sparks curiosity, when energy peaks, and when frustration builds. Over time, they develop a nuanced picture of each child as a learner.

Parents/caregivers hold a different kind of expertise entirely. They know their child so intimately, the one who cries before bed and the one who talks endlessly about one friend or refuses to mention another. They know about the new baby at home, the grandparent who just moved in, and the Saturday soccer game that ended badly.

Neither picture is complete without the other. When families and teachers share their observations openly, something shifts. The child becomes more fully seen. And children who are fully seen tend to flourish.

What This Looks Like Day to Day

The partnership doesn't require grand gestures. It often lives in small moments.

Parents/caregivers can send a quick note: "She was up late and a little anxious this morning." A teacher files it away and checks in gently when that child arrives. The child feels supported. Or a note can be sent that shows appreciation for the teacher.

A teacher shares at a parent/caregiver conference that the child has been drawn to the mapping work lately. The parent/caregiver laughs and reveals that he mapped out the route to his grandparents' house last weekend. The teacher makes a note. The child's interest deepens.

These exchanges build trust, not just between adults but in the child, who senses that the people who love and teach them are connected.



The Prepared Environment Extends Home

In Montessori, there's a concept called the prepared environment, a carefully arranged space designed to support independence, focus, and discovery. Teachers are intentional when creating the environment.

Children don't stop learning when they leave school. The home is an environment, too. When families understand and foster what their child is working on at school, not to replicate lessons but to stay curious and connected, the learning has room to breathe beyond the classroom.

Simple things make a difference. Asking, "What were you working on today?" instead of how school was tends to open more conversation. Letting a child set the table, fold laundry, or help plan dinner mirrors the independence Montessori teachers cultivate all day. These aren't assignments; they're invitations to continue becoming.

The Gradual Release of Responsibility

Each year, children gain independence, autonomy, and problem-solving skills. What parent communication looks like in the early childhood classroom shifts as the child enters the elementary classroom. As children develop stronger communication skills and become more independent, they take on greater responsibility to plan their work and solve problems. Parents can support this gradual release by discerning when teacher communication is needed, or when their child is experiencing an opportunity for growth.

Open-ended questions can empower children:

- When responding to friendship struggles, try That sounds challenging. How have you solved something like this in the past?
- When discussing academic challenges, try What is the most important work you can start with at the beginning of tomorrow's work cycle? Or what is the very first step to getting started?
- When relaying big feelings or frustration, try What helps your body feel calm? Or who is a grown-up you trust that can help you be a problem-solver?

Anticipating Challenges

Montessori classrooms are intentionally designed to guide children toward reaching their full potential. At times, that growth can be uncomfortable. For a toddler who has never had to wait for others before being served a snack, this experience may bring tears. For a three-year-old learning to sit and listen during show and tell, there may be teacher communication about struggling to keep a safe body and gentle hands while sitting next to peers. Elementary and middle



school students are learning to work backward from open-ended projects, which can feel challenging as they break work into smaller tasks completed over time.

Productive struggle often accompanies growth, and when parents and teachers anticipate struggle rather than fear it, they send a powerful message: learning is a journey, and persistence is how we develop capacity. This common understanding can build a unified foundation between parents, teachers, and the child.

When Partnership Gets Hard

Sometimes the partnership asks for more. There might be a concern to raise, a challenge to name, a difficult conversation. These moments are easier to navigate when the relationship is already built, when families and teachers have established trust through smaller, steadier exchanges.

Montessori teachers are trained to approach families as collaborators, not evaluators. Families who lean into that and show up to conferences willing to share, to ask, and to listen tend to find that, together, the united front can figure out most things. Seeing our children struggle can bring up strong emotions; empathy, curiosity, and assuming positive intent can help parents and teachers stay focused on the mutual goal of supporting the child.

A Closing Thought

The family-teacher partnership is a living relationship, one that gets stronger through consistent, honest communication. It thrives when all adults show up and extend goodwill, even when things get complicated.

When that relationship is healthy, children feel it. They move between home and school with a sense of continuity, held by adults who are working together on their behalf. That's not a small thing. It is everything. It may be the most important environment a school and family can create.

Building Independence Through Everyday Routines

BY SHAZAH SABUHI

The beginning of the school year is a good time to consider the value of smooth, consistent morning routines that result in quick and happy drop-offs. Arriving on time not only teaches good habits like timeliness, respect, and consistency to our children but also allows them to experience the benefits of arriving with their peers and participating in morning rituals that set the tone for a positive and meaningful school day.

Morning routines also have the power to be a meaningful teaching tool. When each member of the family, no matter their age, is an active participant, this signals that everyone has the ability to be an active and positive contributor to family life. When children are guided to plan, monitor, and manage the steps of the morning, they are developing essential executive functioning skills that lay a foundation for life.

After longer breaks, it might take some time for children to readjust to the logistics of a school morning. We can help ease this transition for them (and for ourselves as parents) by remembering a few simple things.



GIVE YOUR CHILD THE GIFT OF TIME

We have observed that when children have the time and space that they need to complete their tasks, they are more likely to feel confident, capable, and independent. Dr. Montessori wrote, “Never do for a child that which they can do for themselves.” In order for our children to actually exercise their independence successfully, sufficient time is key. Consider, for example, inviting your child to help you prepare their lunch for the day by slicing an apple and packing it into a container, recognizing that this task could take about five minutes. Older students are capable of packing their lunches independently, given enough time.

WORK BACKWARDS!

On a related note, if you see that your child is needing ten more minutes to get bundled on a cold morning, start waking them up ten minutes earlier. This means that you may want to get them in bed a little earlier the evening before, too. If your child has just learned to tie their shoes, give them enough time so that they can experience the satisfaction and joy of this new milestone without feeling rushed.

HELP YOUR CHILD PLAN AHEAD

Every evening, consider asking your child to check the next day’s weather. They can then choose the clothes they will wear and set them out. This eliminates the all-too-common morning struggles over attire. Similarly, many lunch items can be prepared ahead of time. Have your child work with you to prepare the food items the evening before and invite them to pack the containers into their lunchboxes in the morning. Older students can also consult a calendar the evening before to remind themselves of items they need to pack for the next day (e.g., their violin for a Wednesday lesson or their library bag for a Friday).

DISCUSS EXPECTATIONS AT A TIME WHEN YOUR CHILD IS CALM, RESTED, AND ATTENTIVE.

On the weekends or in the evenings, discuss with your child what they can do independently. Think about using words like “You get to...” instead of “You have to...” This can include things like brushing their teeth, cleaning up after breakfast, and getting bundled up for the cold weather. You can also use this time to remind them of expectations related to safe and smooth dropoffs. If they struggle in the mornings, you can say, “Remember what we talked about last night? Now show me you can do it.”

DON'T UNDERESTIMATE THE VALUE OF GETTING SUFFICIENT SLEEP!

According to a consensus statement put forth by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, in order “to promote optimal health:”

- Infants 4 months to 12 months should sleep 12 to 16 hours per 24 hours (including naps)
- Children 1 to 2 years of age should sleep 11 to 14 hours (including naps)
- Children 3 to 5 years of age should sleep 10 to 13 hours
- Children 6 to 12 years of age should sleep 9 to 12 hours
- Teenagers 13 to 18 years of age should sleep 8 to 10 hours

MODEL CALMNESS AND CONTROL

While you may be getting ready for your workday alongside them, showing children that you are confident and consistent in your own routines sets a good example for your children. As adults, we are sometimes preoccupied with thoughts about our many responsibilities. As much as possible, be present with your children.

AT DROP OFF, ENFORCE SAFETY RULES

Let your child know that it’s important to stay buckled until your car is parked and it’s time to go inside. A quick, loving goodbye is appropriate. If your child is experiencing some separation anxiety, you can help by giving a quick hug and letting the staff member on arrival duty that morning help your child inside. Prolonging or lingering typically makes goodbyes harder for your child! Please know that they are typically settled within a few moments.

As you help your child adjust to the rhythm of the school year, remember to observe and even practice a bit of restraint. An intentional pause can help us notice what in the environment, sequence, or timing may be creating an obstacle to independence.

You may find yourself wondering why your child seems to be the only one still having difficulty separating from you while other children seem settled and independent a month or two into the school year. Our advice? Trust the process, give it time, and stay committed to the routines.