



# Helping to Close Pennsylvania's Achievement Gap Through a Montessori Approach



**CHESTNUT  
HILL  
COLLEGE**

**“Make a wholehearted gift of yourself to God and the dear neighbor.”**

and well-being, critical to the holistic meeting of every child's social, emotional, and cognitive needs.

## THE GAP

The College intends to leverage our grant to help more Montessori early childcare centers to attain full AMS accreditation, thereby ensuring a 4-STAR rating from Keystone STARS (see right)—a guarantee to families that their children are participating each day in stimulating, nurturing early learning programs. Ultimately, these are quality environments that provide a loving atmosphere in which children will thrive, and we are actively working to ensure more of Pennsylvania's families and children have access to them.

Pennsylvania has a quality rating system that promotes quality improvement in early learning and development programs and school-age childcare: the Keystone STARS rating. A Keystone STARS designation informs parents that their children are in a safe, respectful environment in which they are learning new things every day to support current and future successes in school and in life. Early learning programs that participate in Keystone STARS can earn a quality rating score from a STAR 1 to a STAR 4. The higher the STAR level, the higher the quality standards. Montessori recognition or accreditation by AMS automatically earns a facility a 4-STAR rating.

\*OCDEL - Pennsylvania's Office of Childhood Development and Early Learning





**“Montessori SPARK promises to provide a foundational educational opportunity for young children from all backgrounds so they can begin first grade on an equal footing. This has the potential to be life-changing, not only for each child, but also for families. Societal transformation depends upon an educated citizenry, with every young person having the opportunity to benefit from an education of excellence.”**

**- PRESIDENT CAROL JEAN VALE, SSJ, PH.D.**

offer college courses in the evening in community settings near where childcare providers live. These courses will lead to either a bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Studies with a Montessori credential (since 2014, Chestnut Hill College has been the only institution in Pennsylvania that is able to award a Montessori credential), or to a master’s degree in Early Education with a Montessori credential. When possible, courses will be offered online for the convenience of the students and student teaching experiences will take place in the childcare center where each employee already works. Access to these programs is complemented by Pennsylvania’s TEACH grants, a scholarship program that provides grants to childcare workers who are working toward their associate degree, bachelor’s degree or certification—and that will allow some

Montessori SPARK participants to pursue their bachelor’s degrees and credentials at little to no cost.

As part of the program, the College has entered into unique collaborations with Masjidullah Early Child Care Academy (MECCA) in Philadelphia, and Woodlyn Academy in Chester, PA, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Montessori Alliance and Heads of Montessori Schools in the Philadelphia area.

**“The training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than a learning of ideas. It includes the training of character: it is a preparation of the spirit.”**

**- MARIA MONTESSORI**



“At Woodlyn Academy, we pride ourselves on being able to provide an academic, caring, and safe environment for all children, an extension of home. The foundation of Woodlyn Academy’s program is built on a partnership between families and the school, a place where learning and development occur naturally. With support given through the Chestnut Hill College *Montessori SPARK* program and grant, our teachers will be provided with both professional development and resources to meet each child’s individual needs.

Partnering with the *SPARK* program will influence teachers to continue education through an undergraduate or graduate degree. The program will allow teachers to advance their educations, while assisting children with the skills needed to develop cognitive, language, and social skills. A high-quality early learning facility can only be as good as its teaching staff. We are honored and extremely grateful to have the opportunity to strengthen the knowledge of our teaching staff through the *SPARK* grant. We could not be more excited!”

**- TORI WALLACE, OWNER, WOODLYN ACADEMY**



**“This cooperation of Chestnut Hill College, Masjidullah Early Child Care Academy (MECCA) in Philadelphia, PA, and Woodlyn Academy in Chester, PA is exactly what we need to end systemic racism and build opportunity.”**

**- SENATOR ART HAYWOOD  
D-MONTGOMERY/PHILADELPHIA**

Our partnerships with MECCA and Woodlyn Academies are strategic. Both possess STAR 3 ratings, a rating we believe we can advance to STAR 4 by ensuring they receive AMS accreditation by offering our Montessori credentials at their sites—providing a strong proof of concept for the program more broadly.

### **ELEVATING AND EQUALIZING CHILD OUTCOMES IN PENNSYLVANIA**

Scientific research into brain development and the optimal learning window from zero to age five is conclusive. The quality of care and experiences during these early years of life sets the stage for all future interactions and ability to learn.

Pennsylvania’s achievement gap, between economically disadvantaged students and their more affluent peers, has consistently landed it in the bottom half of states in almost every grade and subject tested.

To us, it’s clear that we must trace this gap, which persists along race and class lines, to its source; to the earliest years of childhood education. Money alone will not improve academic outcomes or change the lives of our communities’ children. How we and our partners choose to use funds to make meaningful interventions to ensure that every student is nurtured during the critical window of early development can, has, and will transform the future for the youngest of our students. This is a direction to which Chestnut Hill College is committed as it reflects our commitment to academic excellence and solidarity with our dear neighbors. This is a new beginning holding immense promise for vulnerable populations. 🦋

“Masjidullah Early Child Care Academy (MECCA) is thrilled to be a part of the *SPARK* program with Chestnut Hill College.

At MECCA we are committed to investing in quality early childcare, as evidenced by our modern, newly renovated facility and our Keystone STARS 3 rating. We have one Montessori certified teacher who is doing remarkable work in her classroom. Families are pleasantly surprised that Montessori is available in their neighborhood. They can’t wait until MECCA can provide more Montessori instruction.

From the teacher’s perspective, the Chestnut Hill College partnership will provide our teachers convenient access to classes that will lead to an undergraduate (or advanced) college degree with a Montessori certification. They know that the Montessori certificate will enhance their professional standing, and it will provide a major boost to their marketability and career options.”

**- MEDINA RASHID,  
DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**



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