

GREAT BEGINNINGS TO NEW BEGINNINGS

“The child, making use of all that (they) find around (them), shapes (themselves) for the future.” —Maria Montessori

One of Mimi Basso’s long-standing aspirations has been “to expand the West Side Montessori School program to include a high-quality infant and toddler program to serve the youngest children and families of the community.” This vision is being realized in 2025 with the opening of WSMS’ new Infants, Toddlers, and Twos facility—the Great Beginnings Center.

WSMS’ Teachers Education Program (WSMS-TEP) has long served as a flagship highlight of WSMS programming and a cornerstone to the school’s growth. TEP has been offering Infant and Toddler instruction for over a decade. As the Great Beginnings Center prepares to open, it’s powered by the invaluable experience TEP provides to early childhood teachers. It’s the dawn of a new era at WSMS, bringing TEP’s distinctive expertise to the forefront.

WSMS recognizes that high-quality early care and education are critical to building a healthy and stable society. Designed in response to the needs of parents who wanted to start their younger children in school earlier, the Twos Program at WSMS was launched in the fall of 2013 as a two-year pilot for siblings and families already connected to WSMS’ Multi-Age Program.

Considered a resounding success with full enrollment in its first two years, the Twos Program grew exponentially as families discovered the unique features of a Montessori experience for this age group. Maria Montessori developed her approach to infant and toddler care while living and working in India in the 1940s. She wrote that from birth to three is a critical period of growth for a child as they take in everything in the environment with astounding detail. The adult’s role is to assist the child to aid the full development of life. The Twos Program at WSMS has consistently emphasized physical movement, play, manipulation of real objects, exploration, socialization, and personal autonomy to provide a high-quality experience that maintains fidelity to Dr. Montessori’s guidance.

The success of the Twos Program reiterated a critical need in society as a whole and addressed the specific desires of faculty and families eager to expand opportunities. It has taken nearly 17 years of dedication in the search for a superb facility that maintains the commitment to the Montessori approach, the strategic goals of the school, and the rigorous requirements of the Department of Health in NYC. WSMS is now poised to embark on this bold plan, recommitting to the belief that excellence in early childhood care and education must be expanded to serve all of our children better.



An original Twos teacher and administrator, Karen Deinzer, has returned to school this year to participate in the transition to WSMS’ next chapter. Karen states, “From the beginning of its program for the youngest children, West Side has been committed to high-quality care. I am more than thrilled about the new opportunities for families with children from three months to three years in a year-round program.”

During the same year that the Twos program began at WSMS, the Teacher Education Program (WSMS-TEP) was expanded to include an Infant Toddler level credential program. The TEP program set a strategic goal to develop an educational space for adult learners to collaborate, observe, and learn together. Adult learners at this level study developmental needs and milestones, practice keen observation, and discover how to demonstrate respect for the child’s evolving need for independence. Safety and health measures are reinforced to provide critical understanding for new teachers as they create safe spaces for children. Collaborative relationships with caregivers are the foundation upon which trusting relationships develop. The curriculum emerges from the analysis of observations of children’s unique skills and interests. Learning activities may include activities that help young children in all areas of development, including self-care, food preparation and food service, indoor and outdoor large-motor activities, fine-motor skills, language development, and social interactions.

For over ten years, the WSMS Twos program for children and the WSMS-TEP Infant Toddler program for adults has continued to grow as an increased need for exceptional Montessori environments has been acknowledged. Karen also shared that in the beginning, “TEP began with a small number of adult students, but as the need grew for teachers to learn more about the Montessori philosophy and method at this level, the program has grown substantially, and the new facility will provide a state of the art learning environment for adults in addition to providing excellence in caring for children.” Graduates of the program, including many of the current WSMS faculty, will have increased opportunities to work with children at the

full range of the credential program in which they are enrolled. The benefits of the new building space extend beyond the children and families and will be an essential model of support for the whole community.

Maria Rosado is a long-time Twos and Multi-Age teacher and instructor in TEP and believes that the new facility will provide a wonderful opportunity for TEP to have its own environment for adult classes. Going forward, WSMS will now have a space for these new Montessorians to see how to provide an excellent space right from the beginning. She shares, “In an infant room, the child IS the curriculum. These adults need to see beautiful environments and understand how to put theory in action, and with our own WSMS teachers participating in the program, the training experience will be eye-opening as they discuss and explore what they are doing and why.” Montessori Infant and Toddler teachers practice how to talk with parents and how to design high-quality spaces, and they learn how to work within classroom teams to benefit the very youngest children. Maria goes on to note how “WSMS teachers have observed the transition from the Twos environments to Multi-Age classrooms as positive, where the child is successful in multi-step activities, can regulate themselves, follow directions, and explore and be curious.” The Twos curriculum is based on forming solid relationships as children learn to become part of a community. This formation of the child’s personality translates to an early childhood group in a way that promotes an appreciation for what Dr. Montessori called “social cohesion,” in which children become aware that they are individuals within a collective.

Dr. Montessori often described the child as a “citizen of the world” and encouraged adults to unify themselves to collaborate in educating our children, who “are the best part of humanity.” What a gift this new program will offer to the WSMS community! How fortunate we are to be on this journey together! Let us all work together to support and develop a supportive environment to serve our families’ youngest children, meet the needs of our faculty and adult learners, and dedicate ourselves to the reconstruction of education Dr. Montessori wrote about nearly a century ago.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF WSMS-TEP

In 1967, Project CHAMP (Central Harlem Association of Montessori Parents) was founded by Roslyn D. Williams to prepare parents to become active participants in their children’s education and to increase the pool of Montessori teachers in New York City. CHAMP was the first American Montessori School (AMS) Teacher Education Program affiliated in New York City and the first African American-established Montessori TEP in the US. WSMS faculty and administrators and faculty from other Montessori schools taught at Project CHAMP in those early years.

In September 1994, the WSMS Board of Trustees voted to move Project CHAMP under the umbrella of WSMS to ensure the legacy of Montessori teacher preparation in NYC. The name was then changed to West Side Montessori School—Teacher Education Program. For many years, WSMS-TEP offered a program to prepare adults to earn the AMS Early Childhood credential. In 2012, the Infant Toddler level was added in response to local needs. Crucially aware of the expanding worldwide need for high-quality Montessori educators over a broader range of ages, WSMS-TEP expanded to add the Elementary I (6–9), I-II (6–12), and II (9–12) levels in partnership with Metropolitan Montessori School. The first cohort of Elementary began in 2016. The Administrator program, which prepares adults for leadership positions in Montessori schools, accepted the inaugural cohort in 2017. WSMS-TEP was one of the first programs in the US to add the Montessori Inclusion Endorsement to prepare credentialed Montessori teachers to serve children with exceptional needs.

WSMS-TEP LEADERSHIP TEAM

Lisanne Pinciotti, *Program Director, Early Childhood and Administrator Coordinator*

Karen Deinzer, *Infant Toddler Practicum Coordinator*

Melissa Freeman, *Early Childhood and Administrator Practicum Coordinator*

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Maria Rosado, *Infant Toddler Academic Coordinator*

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