A.3. 1 Mastery and Promotion

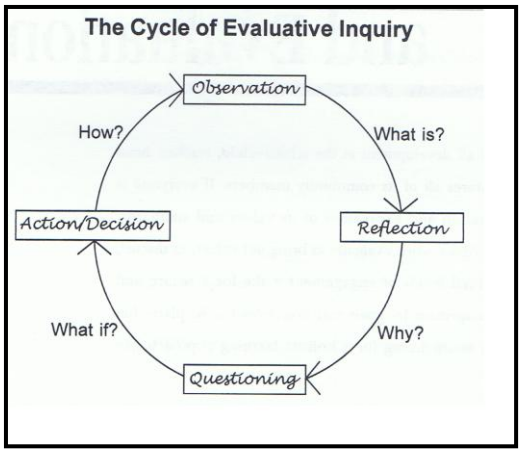
Background

Camino Montessori adheres to the developmental continuum as prescribed by Dr. Montessori in her *"Four Planes of Development"* (refer to *Section A.1*). As mentioned in previous sections of this application, our elementary curriculum is designed for children within their second plane of development, which comprises ages 6-12 years (1st-6th grade). It is our vision to offer the complete Montessori elementary program by the 2015-2016 school year.

During our first 3 years of operation, we will be growing into, and stabilizing our *Elementary I* (1st-3rd grade) level/program which will initially include our Kindergarten students. Our goal is to offer the complete Montessori primary level (3-6 year olds) by our 3rd-4th year of operation, which will include our Kindergarten students.

In Montessori education there are three critical transition periods where it is necessary to evaluate the readiness for a child to advance to the next level; at the end of the Kindergarten year, the end of *Elementary I* (typically 3rd grade), and, finally, the end of *Elementary II* (typically 6th grade). Prior to these transitions, our holistic evaluation process occurs continually throughout each day, week, and culminates at the end of each academic year.

We believe that our school's development and success is a composite of all development at our school—child, teacher, support staff, Director, and parent. Montessori evaluation goes to the root of the word *evaluate*: to bring out values, to discuss, exchange, give feedback so that optimal levels of engagement and partnership make for a strong, supportive, and focused learning environment. While school management by goals and objectives has its place, evaluation as a "whole-school process" is in line with our holistic learning approach and philosophy of education. Our practice of evaluation will continually be at the "heart" of our school environment. Therefore, Camino Montessori has adopted the "Cycle of Evaluative Inquiry", as defined in *The Whole School Montessori Handbook* (North American Montessori Teacher Association), which will guide all levels of evaluation, including our student assessment process outlined in Section A.3



Briefly, *The Cycle of Evaluative Inquiry* involves 4 "key components", which are:

Observation—Careful observation is essential to any meaningful evaluation. The challenge in observation is to watch and listen without bias or prejudice.

Reflection—Reflection upon observations gives attention to details and seeks to make sense of them. Does the observation validate or challenge assumptions? Reflection helps us to see patterns and make connections.

Questioning—Questions are equally as important as answers because through questioning we gain new

insights and discoveries. Our questions, based on observation and reflection, lead us to propose possible answers as a way of investigating, modifying, perfecting, and creating. ***Action/Decision***—Decision and action are ways of testing our ideas, improving our practice, finding a different or better solution. They spring from our questions, but do not lead, by themselves to answers. The answers evolve as we continue the cycle of inquiry—again, observing the results or effects of actions and continuing through the circular process.

Promotion/Retention Practice

Our Montessori curriculum accommodates a full spectrum of learners due to its rich curriculum designed to respond to the interests and tendencies of children at this level in their development. Accommodation to individual needs (a 'personalized' approach) is an inherent asset of our methodology. We expect our students to progress each year by completing the Montessori curriculum, and mastering core academic skills as outlined in State standards—both necessary to support their success at the next level.

When considering promotion (accelerating a student to the next level), the child's social and emotional growth is to be taken into consideration. Parents and teachers, (and the Director, if deemed necessary) will determine if this is the best course of action for the student by using criteria such as intellectual maturity, academic achievement, standardized testing, and including physical, social, psychological, and emotional considerations.

Retention (remaining at the same level for an additional year) is an action that may be taken to assist a student to be more successful in their learning. Early intervention is critical for maximizing the positive outcomes needed for our students' success. Risk for retention will be identified as early in the child's school career as possible. As soon as a student is identified as 'at risk', the teacher and the Director will begin interventions to assist the student in the areas of concern. Parents will be included in this discussion/process as early as possible, and as early in the school year as possible.

- Students will be identified for promotion or retention on the basis of:
- Academic achievement and standardized testing
  Current Minimum Expectations for Promotion to the Next Grade/Level
    - Completes at least 80% of Camino Montessori curriculum at 80% mastery
    - Meets Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (ASBCS) *Level of Academic Performance* set for State math and reading assessments.
- Physical, social, psychological, and emotional considerations
- Special needs
- Information provided by parents, guardians, teachers, and other outside resources, when applicable

The demonstration of individual student learning will be measured by, but not limited to, the following:

- Montessori-based assessments in core curricular areas (e.g., *Albanesi* Montessori curricular products and assessment tools). **Minimum expectation: Completes at least 80% of Camino Montessori curriculum at 80% mastery as indicated by MRX generated records and data**
- Teacher/Classroom-based student assessments and observations in reading, language arts, and math--grade level placement scores at least a year above/below expectations.
- Scientifically based diagnostic screening and assessments in math and reading
- State mandated assessments (AIMS & Stanford 10)—exceeding/falling below grade level expectations as defined by the Arizona State Board of Charter Schools and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE).
- The meeting of intervention goals/objectives as determined by the Student Support Team (SST) and/or the student's IEP.

English Language Learners (ELL)
With current research indicating that it takes 2-3 years to become proficient in English conversational skills, and 5-7 years to become cognitively/academically fluent, Camino Montessori recognizes that English Learners may be 'at risk' based on the challenges they face in acquiring mastery of curricular areas in English. Students learning English will be provided with supplemental instruction as a key intervention to ensure that they will eventually gain expected proficiency for their level.

Decisions regarding the promotion or retention of students identified as English Language Learners require special consideration. Following the supplemental instruction for the English Learner, if it is determined through the SST process that the student would benefit from retention, the above determinations and process will be followed.

Special Education (IDEA)
Students whose physical, mental, or learning disabilities are provided protection under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* have their educational needs supported through Special Education (specially designed instruction) and related services (which enable them to benefit from their Special Education program).

Modification of curriculum and student assessment will be utilized for students on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Accommodations put in place for students who have a 504 Plan or are in Special Education are not used when considering retention of the student.

Retention may be considered for students on a 504 Plan or IEP if the academic, social and emotional needs of the student would benefit from remaining in the same level for an additional year. The SST will include a 'highly qualified' educational specialist, as defined and required by Arizona Charter Law.

Appeals Process
When recommendations for promotion or retention are not agreed upon by the parents and/or guardians, they will be advised of their right to appeal first to the Director, and, if not resolved,

may present a final appeal to the Camino Governing Board. The Director will provide the Governing Board all pertinent documentation relating to the promotion/retention decision, including, but not limited to, assessment/testing results, student progress reports, and SST meeting notes.