

# A Public School Makes the Case for ‘Montessori for All’

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The five miles from Interstate 95 into Latta, South Carolina, amble past fireworks shops and stretches of farmland bordered by matchstick pines and interspersed with the occasional home. Railroad tracks and a lone post office mark the center of town, home to 1,300 people and one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school that serve students in a county nearly 100 miles wide.

In many ways, Latta is no different from other communities scattered throughout the rural South: Jobs are limited, businesses are local, and residents know one another. But the opening of a Title I public Montessori school has put this small town at the forefront of a movement that is upending the status quo around access to progressive education.

More than a century old, Montessori education takes a holistic, child-centered approach to teaching and learning that researchers say is effective, but for decades these schools have largely been the domain of [affluent, white families](#). Nationally, estimates suggest that between 80 to 90 percent of U.S. Montessori schools are private, and most are concentrated in urban or suburban enclaves—not communities like Latta, where the median income is \$24,000.

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To an outsider, a Montessori classroom may seem chaotic, but every component—from the layout to the school schedule—is designed with specific purpose, emphasizes Angeline Lillard, a [psychology professor](#) at the University of Virginia who has conducted research on Montessori schools for the last 15 years.