

Guide At A Glance

Alternative Education Approaches

MONTESSORI

The Montessori method was born in 1907 in the slums of Italy, when physician Maria Montessori founded Casa dei Bambini, or Children's House, a school for 50 preschoolers. She believed that children learn best when allowed to independently explore an orderly environment, stocked with hands-on materials that engage all five senses. Today, the United States is home to 10,000 Montessori schools, with dozens in South Carolina alone. More than 60 percent are for children less than 6 years old, with an increasing number extending through high school; kids are grouped in three-year age spans. Classrooms for the youngest children come stocked with miniature furniture and kitchens, which enables them to make their own snacks and lunches. Independence and order are key, as students are free to move around the room, selecting from neatly arranged materials such as strings of beads that represent numbers or wooden blocks symbolizing letters. "Montessori is hyper intellectual," comments Tim Seldin, of the International Montessori Council. "We raise kids who are joyful scholars." A 2006 study in *Science Magazine* found Montessori 5-year-olds were significantly better prepared in science and math than those who attended conventional preschools. They also tested better on executive function, defined as the ability to adapt in response to problems. "They don't just make you memorize facts," says 15-year-old Natacha Stutzman, who attended a Montessori school in Sarasota, FL, through 8th grade. "They teach you life lessons." *Find details at Montessori.org.*

WALDORF

The Waldorf movement began in 1919,

when Austrian scientist Rudolf Steiner established a school for children of employees of the Waldorf Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart, Germany. According to his philosophy, children evolve through three, 7-year stages, first absorbing the world through the senses in early childhood, and later through fantasy and imagination. Only after puberty comes the rational, abstract power of the intellect. Consequently, Waldorf's lower-grade educators emphasize free play and fantasy and discourage exposure to media. Most schools allow no computers in the classroom until middle school, and reading is not formally taught until second grade.

In contrast to the widespread elimination of art and music classes in public schools, Waldorf's philosophy centers on creating the "Renaissance child," encouraging every student to play an instrument and participate in theater. There are 165 Waldorf schools in North America, but none in South Carolina. Some homeschool parents, however, teach their children using the Waldorf method as their guide. *Find details at WhyWaldorfWorks.org.*

HOMESCHOOLING AND UNSCHOOLING

Today, more than 2 million students are homeschooled in the United States, up from 850,000 in 1999, according to the US Department of Education. While roughly 90 percent of these students follow some set curriculum, about 10 percent adhere to an approach called "unschooling," which, much like democratic education, allows students to choose what and how they wish to learn, and for how long.



"I define unschooling as allowing children as much freedom to learn in the world as their parents can comfortably bear," says Pat Farenga, president of Holt Associates Inc, a homeschooling consulting firm. "For instance, a young child's interest in hot rods might lead him or her to a study of how the engine works (science), how and when the car was built (history and business), and who built it (biography). They learn when it makes sense for them to do so." *Find details at HomeEdMag.com, supplemented by Unschooling.com.*

THE HOMESCHOOLING WAVE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Carissa Leventis-Cox is a stay-at-home mom, natural foods cook and homeschool teacher to her young son. She is also a representative of the Gifted Homeschoolers Forum in South Carolina and the leader of the Columbia Holistic Moms Network that meets in the health food store community area in Lexington.

"If you are listening to your child, challenging him on concepts, you are homeschooling," says Carissa. "The options for homeschooling are many, and the resources are tremendous in South Carolina. In a public school class with

20 students, can a teacher give full attention and stimulate learning equal to one-on-one attention from a parent?"

Carissa explained away all of the myths that people have about homeschooling, such as homeschoolers aren't socialized with other children, and that they miss out on band, music groups or organized sports. "Homeschool children join with others frequently and work with children from diverse backgrounds and different ages," adds Carissa. "It's actually better."

Homeschool groups benefit from a diversity of parents as well, with backgrounds that become valuable teaching resources, such as naturalists, language teachers, music and art instructors and experts in various professional fields who combine their talents as teachers for their community homeschool groups.

Community sports venues offer team sports, although public schools don't allow homeschoolers to be on school teams. "Near me in Irmo, there is a music center that homeschoolers can use before 3 pm, after which the public school students begin arriving," says Carissa. "We even have prom and graduation venues for homeschoolers."

What if parents work? How can they offer their own children home-

school benefits? "If parents work, they can still home-school, but it takes more careful scheduling. It takes time, dedication and love, and with that, a knowledge level or ability to find resources." Carissa finds the public library to be a key resource. "My son gets 60 books per week. The librarians help with research and even send books." For parents considering homeschool options, there are a multitude of state and national resources and support systems to research and community support systems to explore.

For more info, visit Carissa Leventis-Cox's blog, TheCardinalHouse.blogspot.com, and visit South Carolina Association of Independent Home Schools at www.SCAIHS.org.

HOMESCHOOLING REGULATIONS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA

There are state-mandated rules for homeschooling:

- Parents must have at least a high school diploma or GED.
- Parents need only test if they are homeschooling under local school district supervision. Those

homeschooling with a home-school association need not test.

- School time must equal or exceed 180 instructional days per year, each at least four and one-half hours long.
- Curriculum must include at least the basic instructional areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies, and in grades 7 through 12, composition and literature.

For more info on area alternative schools, contact:

Montessori School of Florence

510 W Palmetto St, Florence
FlorenceMontessori.com

Pawleys Island Montessori

236 Commerce Dr, Pawleys Island,
PawleysIslandMontessori.org

McLaurin Elementary

1400 McMillan Ln, Florence
FSD1.org/mclaurin

North Vista Elementary

1100 N Irby St, Florence
FSD1.org/northvista



Coming in September

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Natural Awakenings

Explores How Creativity Heals Us,
Lifts Our Spirits,
Makes Us Feel Good,
and Inspires Community

natural
awakenings®

For more information about
advertising and how you can participate,

call **843-497-0390**