

Furman to study South Carolina Montessori impact

The Riley Institute at Furman University in Greenville, SC, has been awarded a \$370,000 grant from the Self Family Foundation of Greenwood, SC, to study the impact of Montessori education on public schools in South Carolina.

It is the first statewide grant to study Montessori education in the United States.

Montessori education in South Carolina public schools has grown dramatically in the last 10 years through the Self Family Foundation's considerable investment in public Montessori classrooms and in Lander University's Montessori education program. Montessori programs now serve more than 20 South Carolina school districts representing about 4,500 students.

The Riley Institute's Center for Education Policy and Leadership will conduct a five-year, comprehensive study of how public school Montessori programs impact stakeholders in the state.

Researchers will examine the impacts of the Montessori program on student achievement and progress, discipline and affective learning outcomes. The study will also look at how Montessori impacts learning and teaching, and parent satisfaction with Montessori programming.

The research team is a collaboration between the Riley Institute and Furman's departments of political science and education. Principal investigator Brooke Culclasure is research director for the Riley Institute's Center for Education Policy and Leadership, and co-investigators are professors David Fleming (political science) and Lorraine Dejong (education).

Barbara Ervin, Montessori program director at Lander University, said, "supporters of Montessori education believe the study can provide answers to many of our most pressing educational problems. To date, only a handful of research studies on Montessori have been completed. It's heartening to see the Riley Institute take on a major statewide examination of Montessori education. It will make a major contribution to our understanding of evidence-based Montessori practice."

Self Family Foundation president Frank J. Wideman III added, "We believe the Montessori Method is a valuable option in our public schools that enables our students to be more successful learners. We are particularly interested in measuring its impact on students from more disadvantaged backgrounds in rural South Carolina. While there is much anecdotal evidence that Montessori education makes a real difference in student achievement, we are interested in this comprehensive study providing reliable data as to the program's value. We are excited to partner with the Riley Institute in this important effort."