

Stonebrook Montessori

Grant Type: **Dollar and nondollar support**

Dollar Amount: **\$150,000**

Foundation Name: **The Hershey Foundation**

What was your objective with the grant or initiative?

The objective of the grant was to provide 2 years of planning for the first Montessori charter school in Ohio and to change the law so that families could enroll their 3-year-olds in the free charter school. (Charter schools in Ohio usually start at age 5.) The school serves urban children from the city and inner-ring suburbs with high-quality, authentic Montessori programs from ages 3 to 15 years, growing gradually 1 year at a time.

What were the results of this grant or initiative?

In August 2015 after 2 years of planning, research, and development, Stonebrook Montessori successfully opened its doors to children ages 3 to 7 years from Cleveland. House Bill 487 successfully passed, and children were admitted into Stonebrook at age 3 years, when a typical Montessori preschool begins its program. Funding was obtained through the Department of Education's early childhood division for the 3- and 4-year-olds.



Why would you say this grant or initiative had outsized impact?

Through personal connections within the Cleveland community, The Hershey Foundation's president and CEO formed an advisory council of well-connected organizations and people who guided the development of the school, purchased and renovated an abandoned building, raised almost \$6 million, found the connections in the state capital to change the law to admit 3-year-olds, hired a talented school principal, and launched the school. To date, 95% of the children are reenrolled for the second school year, all the teachers are returning, and one assistant will be going for her Montessori training. The school is opening with more classrooms to meet the needs of 160-plus 3- to 9-year-olds, up from 95 children last year.

The foundation's president and CEO has dedicated personal involvement with the start-up grant money and volunteer time and dedication using her talents and years of experience to find a solution for the education of the young child when brain development is most critical. With only 10% of Montessori schools in the public sector (90% are tuition based and out of reach for many families), Stonebrook Montessori is a model for the region and the nation.

Some foundations do not allow their trustees the opportunity to volunteer at the organizations funded by the foundation but this school could not have been started without the combination of grant funding and personal time and expertise offered by The Hershey Foundation. It is self-fulfilling and fulfills the mission of this small family foundation from Cleveland. It is the CEO's hope that others can learn from her experience on how to make something important happen for our youngest and most vulnerable children.

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