

## A. Establishing The Need

### PART 1: Mission and Philosophy

#### Mission

The mission of The Sojourner Truth School is to empower students to transform the world. Students at Truth will graduate ready for success in college, career, and life. They will serve as active agents in the construction of peace. They will know who they are, what they want, and where they are going. They can walk into any space, find their place, and make a powerful contribution. Truth achieves this vision through a Montessori education built upon student-led classrooms with a learning environment deliberately designed to enable student engagement in meaningful, authentic work and to foster a close-knit community where students pursue justice and practice stewardship.

#### Philosophy

As a Montessori school, The Sojourner Truth School commits to deep, personalized learning through carefully designed classroom environments and freedom within limits. This time-tested model is expanded into secondary education by emphasizing personalized learning with an understanding of the skills and tools that a diverse population of 12- to -18-year-olds need to be successful students, leaders, and citizens. Specifically, we meet adolescents' developmental need for authentic social interaction and meaningful work with real application. **All aspects of the Truth School - from instructional model, to physical environment, to school culture - are anchored by the following core values: (1) honor self development; (2) pursue justice everywhere; (3) design for positive impact; and (4) challenge the mind, body and soul** (*for a detailed explanation of the expectations for embodying each value, please see the full Truth Competency Framework in the appendix*). These values, together with the aforementioned principles of Montessori educational philosophy, form a coherent vision for the Truth School.



**HONOR  
SELF-DEVELOPMENT**



**PURSUE JUSTICE  
EVERYWHERE**



**DESIGN FOR  
POSITIVE IMPACT**



**CHALLENGE THE  
MIND, BODY, AND SOUL**

*Figure 1: Look for these icons throughout the following sections to signal how these core values connect to various components of The Sojourner Truth School's model.*

The Sojourner Truth School will serve as the only public secondary pathway for families who are currently in Montessori elementary schools and who wish to continue with a Montessori program, and it will also be an

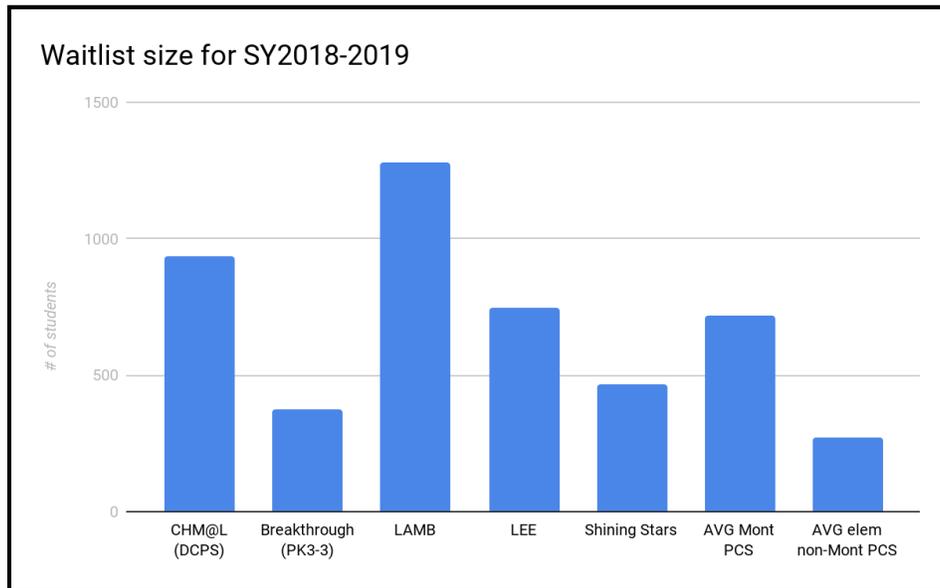
ideal choice for any family without prior Montessori experience that is looking for a personalized middle and high school experience designed specifically with the developmental needs of an adolescent in mind. The Montessori Method was initially framed over a century ago to to close gaps between low income and higher income students and between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, and its focus on learning in context, personalization, responsive curriculum, and collaboration also make it an ideal approach for English language learners (Montessori, 2008). Truth will continue the tradition of Montessori education by creating an inclusive learning community that promotes and achieves success for all.

## PART 2: Evaluating the Landscape

### **Introduction: Why D.C. needs a public Montessori middle and high school**

While the factory model of schooling is generally considered outmoded and obsolete, it nevertheless persists in having a deep impact on our students' educational experiences in Washington, DC and across the nation. The majority of our middle and high school students still spend their days sitting at desks for a predetermined amount of time until the bell rings, signaling for them to move from science to Spanish, ELA to social studies, or math to art. Not only is this an outdated approach to academic disciplines, but it creates a structure where social emotional learning is inherently devalued. Our schools and systems accept that students have unique needs and proficiencies as individuals, but acknowledgement and accommodations are often limited to extension work or scaffolds in the classroom, the opportunity to choose an elective, have an intervention class, or to participate in a prescribed advisory lesson. School reform efforts often focus on relatively superficial changes, such as a longer school year or a new reading curriculum, rather than the fundamental assumptions on which our school systems are built. **Bolstered by evidence-based research on the positive effects of the Montessori Method on both academic and social-emotional outcomes at the secondary level, The Sojourner Truth School will challenge these assumptions.**

Interest and demand for public Montessori programs is growing both locally and nationally, and DCPS and District public charter schools have not been able to keep up. OSSE's annual enrollment audit shows that in Washington, DC there were 2,869 families waitlisted between Breakthrough Montessori PCS, Latin American Montessori Bilingual PCS, Lee Montessori PCS, and Shining Stars Montessori PCS for school year 2018-2019 (and another 936 waitlisted for Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan in DCPS). This number represents 13.8% of the elementary school students waitlisted for public charter schools in DC, despite these four schools making up less than 5% of the total elementary school enrollment in District public charter schools (*OSSE's Audit and Verification of Student Enrollment*). This disproportionate relationship between the number of students getting waitlisted and the number of seats available indicates a clear demand for more Montessori programs. It should be noted that this data exists despite the fact that, during empathy interviews, Truths Design Team met numerous families that were unaware of Montessori as a method or even as an option in the first place.



*Figure 2: Waitlist data from OSSE’s 2018-2019 Audit and Verification of Student Enrollment*

Parents of students that are currently enrolled in public Montessori elementary schools, meanwhile, have expressed deep interest in and advocacy towards the development of a Montessori pathway through high school. These parents have been part of The Sojourner Truth School’s design process from the beginning, and there is representation on the Truth Parent Design Committee and the Truth Academic Design Committee from parents associated with each of the District’s five public Montessori schools (both charter and DCPS). These families overwhelmingly speak towards the investment they have made in a personalized, student-centered pedagogy where their students have been given freedom within limits and encouraged to explore their personal interests at depth, and their desire as parents to continue with that experience for their children through middle and high school (see parent letters of support in the appendix as evidence). Truth will address the needs of both parents unfamiliar with Montessori and also those currently associated with Montessori elementary schools by increasing enrollment seat access in the public sector to Montessori and also by working with all families and all types of elementary schools in all eight wards to build understanding of Montessori philosophy and to promote it as an option at all levels.

**The Need for Montessori Middle and High School: Academics**

A number of innovative models have arisen both locally and nationally to challenge the traditional schooling construct:



Clark was the nation’s first public Montessori high school, and is nationally recognized for academic excellence, with Clark’s students regularly scoring among Cincinnati Public Schools’ top marks on state exams. Clark is known for field studies and intersessions, community service as a method for learning about the world outside of the school building, an emphasis on thematic work, seminars, and social-emotional learning. Middle school students at Clark are organized into multi-grade level learning communities and each high school senior completes a yearlong project of her or his choice (2017-2018 Ohio District and School Report Cards and [clark.cps-k12.org/about](http://clark.cps-k12.org/about)).



The Summit Schools in California have taken a competency-based approach where students become intimately familiar with the expectations for high quality work, and where self-assessment, reflection, goal-setting, and action-planning are daily endeavors and central tenets of their model. **Each of Summit’s California campuses - K2, Rainier, Denali, and Preparatory Charter High - has consistently outperformed other students from their districts and across California in both ELA and math** (California Department of Education School Accountability Report, 2016-2017). Multiple members of Truth’s founding team have direct experience as partners and trainers with Summit (see Summit’s letter of support in appendix).



Columbia Heights Education Campus in DCPS has structured personalized learning time blocks into each day, where students set goals and determine their own learning pathways. Its 8th grade, which piloted the model in 2015-2016 and has continued since, tripled its numbers of students earning proficient or higher both in ELA and in math over its first two years of implementation (OSSE, 2019). The model was then expanded to include 9th and 10th grades as well, and **over the last three years CHEC has experienced a quadrupling in the number of students scoring L4 or L5 on the PARCC exams for math** (OSSE, 2019). **Multiple members of Truth’s founding team had direct roles as administrators and teachers through these periods.**

Figure 3: Innovative school models that have yielded positive achievement results

An emphasis on social-emotional learning and providing students with the choice to explore topics of personal

A study found that, “over time the Montessori children fared better on measures of academic achievement, social understanding, and mastery orientation, and they also reported relatively more liking of scholastic tasks” (Lillard, *Frontiers of Psychology*, October, 2017).

interest like at Clark Montessori High School, the focus on student agency and self-development being done at Summit, and the deconstruction of traditional bell schedules in favor of extended and self-directed work blocks like the ones at Columbia Heights Education Campus were all part of Maria Montessori’s vision over a century ago for how secondary schools should support adolescents. The pillars of Montessori philosophy - meaningful work with real life application, self-directed learning blocks for an extended period of time, and the deliberate design of the learning environment - have

been validated by modern research in neuropsychology and other branches of science, and are even more relevant today than they were in the early 20th century (Marshall, 2017). The central tenet of the Montessori Method is to “follow the child,” and so the unique needs, interests, and strengths of each child are the starting point for adults’ work. Montessori developed her approach with the aim of meeting the needs of under-resourced students, and while the Method is often associated with wealthy and privileged alumni and advocates (such as Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, and Sergey Brin and Larry Page, co-founders of Google) it remains an ideal approach for addressing the needs of all students, regardless of experience, ability designation, or socioeconomic level (Lillard, Heise, Ichey, Tong, Hart, & Bray, 2017). More specifics regarding how Truth’s approach will support students with unique needs are detailed throughout *Chapter 2: Education Plan* and *Chapter 3: Management Plan*.

Significant work at the federal, state, district, and school level over recent decades has been done to identify and minimize opportunity and accessibility gaps in education. Mandates such as No Child Left Behind, the Every Student Succeeds Act, and numerous state and district-level accountability measures have pushed schools to close gaps between students of color and their White peers, between students with disabilities and their peers, between students of different levels of socioeconomic status, and between English learners and their peers, among others. Despite significant pressure and investment, however, in many cases these gaps have persisted or grown. In DCPS, the achievement gap in ELA between Black and White and Hispanic and White students in ELA decreased in 2018 but had increased from 2016 to 2017 (PARCC 2018 Final Results, [www.dcps.dc.gov](http://www.dcps.dc.gov)). The gaps between those same students in math increased each year from 2015 to 2017 (PARCC 2018 Final Results, [www.dcps.dc.gov](http://www.dcps.dc.gov)). Recent research has demonstrated, however, that the Montessori Method equalizes and elevates outcomes between different groups. **In a 2017 study done in a high-poverty district of Hartford, CT, results showed that a Montessori education helped typically underperforming and low-income students keep pace with their higher-income peers.** The study found that, “over time the Montessori children fared better on measures of academic achievement, social understanding, and mastery orientation, and they also reported relatively more liking of scholastic tasks” (Lillard, 2017). These results suggest that The Sojourner Truth School’s adherence to the Montessori Method will promote its ability not only to raise achievement for all groups of students, as was the case in the 2017 study, but to close the achievement gap while doing so.

While 89.6% of pre-K to 12th grade students in 2018 are enrolled in public schools, less than 10% of Montessori schools are public.

Frustratingly, however, there also exists a significant disparity in access to Montessori schools in the first place. While 89.6% of pre-K to 12th grade students across the United States in 2018 are enrolled in public schools, less than 10% of Montessori schools are public (Department of Education and The Montessori Census).

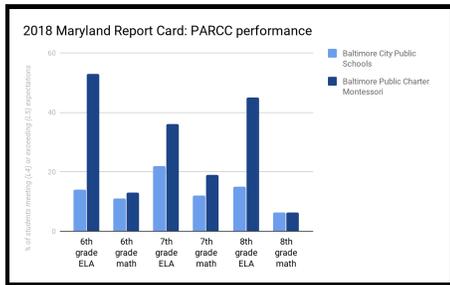
**The unfortunate incongruity, then, is that research has shown Montessori schools to be effective in closing gaps between low-income and higher-income students, but in many neighborhoods Montessori is not even an option for the very students and families that may**

Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan, the District’s only public Montessori program that has students in grades 7 and 8, significantly outscored DC averages for those grades in both PARCC ELA and PARCC math in SY2017-2018 (Learn DC, OSSE).

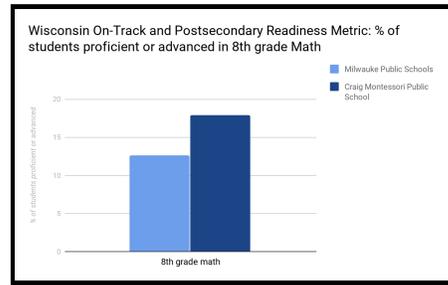
**benefit most.** This is the case in Washington, DC, where there is currently no public Montessori option that goes all the way through the 12th grade.

Further, data suggests a strong need for more desirable public middle and high school options for students and families across the District. PARCC data from SY2017-2018 shows that while 36% of 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students in DC were proficient in math, only 23% of students who took 6th, 7th, or 8th grade math scored proficient. The percentages were even lower in high school, with only 10% of high school geometry students scoring proficient. While PARCC ELA scores remain relatively stable from elementary school to middle school, there is a significant drop in high school, where only 29% of students score proficient. These drops in proficiency are reflected in parents' myschooldc.org application numbers. The average waitlist size for DCPCS elementary schools is 298, as compared to 199 for DCPCS middle and high schools. In addition, there are 8 DCPCS elementary schools with waitlists over 1,000, compared to only 2 DCPCS middle or high schools (*OSSE's Audit and Verification of Student Enrollment*).

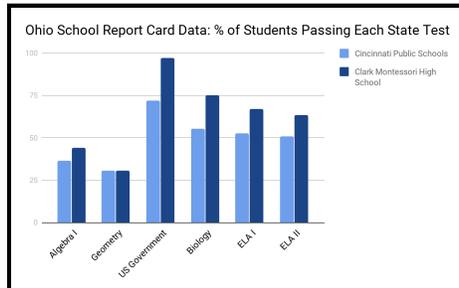
This waitlist data demonstrates a strong demand for more high quality middle and high school options, and there is clear evidence to suggest that a Montessori middle and high school will help to satisfy this demand. Baltimore Montessori Public Charter School in Baltimore City Public Schools, Craig Montessori in Milwaukee Public School, and Clark Montessori High School in Cincinnati Public Schools consistently outscore their districts' averages on achievement tests (2017-2018 Ohio District and School Report Cards, 2016-2017 Milwaukee Public Schools District Report Cards, School Report Cards from the Maryland Department of Education).



**Figure 4a:** Achievement data comparing Baltimore City Public Schools and Baltimore Public Charter Montessori

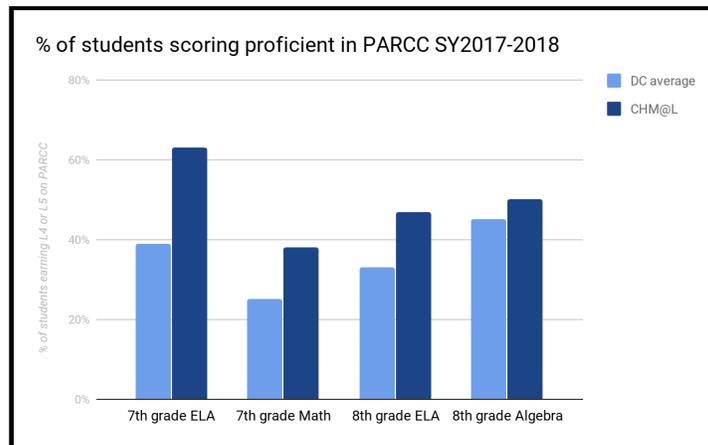


**Figure 4b:** The Wisconsin State metric for on-track and postsecondary readiness in middle school is 8th grade math



**Figure 4c:** Achievement data comparing Cincinnati Public Schools and Clark Montessori High School

Additionally, Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan (CHM@L), the District’s only public Montessori program that has students in grades 7 and 8, significantly outscored DC averages in all tests in which they recorded data in SY2017-2018 (Learn DC, OSSE, 2018). This data strongly suggests that a Montessori approach will result in significant gains in both math and ELA for students in the District. CHM@L has nevertheless struggled to maintain robust numbers of students in its middle school program, which suggests that families want a secure pathway to take their student all the way through 12th grade (see parent support letters from CHM@L in the appendix for more evidence of this). Truth seeks to provide this pathway, thus encouraging more families to stay with Montessori and realize these academic gains.



**Figure 5:** Comparison of DC’s only public Montessori 7th and 8th grade program to other schools.  
 NOTE: DCPS did not release CHM@L results for 6th grade ELA and 6th grade math due to small sample size.

### The Need for Montessori Middle and High School: Social-Emotional Learning

There has been widespread progress acknowledging the importance of social-emotional learning and development, and numerous districts and schools are embedding practices like community circles and restorative justice into all classrooms rather than limiting them to discrete advisory or guidance periods. Due to advances in brain science, we now know about trauma’s effects on the brain at the molecular level during child development. Trauma leads to the production of chemicals like cytokines and cortisol, which build up and influence the brain’s physical structure and function. The prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and hippocampus, which are all important centers for performance in school, are directly altered by these buildups (Bellis, Michael & Zisk, Abigail, 2014). Montessori schools do not need to be excessively retro-fitted in order to respond to these advances in neuroscience and the trending attention to adolescent brain development, as these strategies are already embedded in Montessori approach (Lillard, 2017). The Montessori Method fosters self-regulation, and also what *Turnaround For Children*, a group informed by empirical research that

Montessori schools do not need to be excessively retro-fitted in order to respond to these advances in neuroscience and the trending attention to adolescent brain development, as these strategies are already embedded in its approach (Stoll Lillard, 2017, 107).

translates neuroscientific studies into strategies to healthy development and academic achievement for students affected by adversity, considers the four integral components of relational trust: social respect, personal regard, high competence, and integrity (“The Science of Brain Development,” 2018).

DCPS, in its 5-year strategic *Capital Commitment* plan, cites “Educating the whole child” as a strategic priority and commits to embedding social emotional learning into classrooms and culture. Following research showing that Black students are three times more likely to be suspended than White students and that just one suspension doubles a student’s likelihood of dropping out, the U.S. Federal Government responded with guidelines discouraging zero-tolerance policies and supporting restorative practices (Nussbaum, 2018). Results thus far in DC have been mixed. Between 2015 and 2017, for example, OSSE reports that the number of students receiving out of school suspensions dropped by 1.95%, but the number of out of school suspension incidents actually rose by 1.59% (State of Discipline: 2016-2017 School Year). Data suggests that the Montessori approach has power to disrupt these racial disparities in disciplinary consequences. A study from 2015 that looked at the Relative Rate Index (RRI) as a measure of racially disproportionate use of out of school suspensions in data from a large urban district in the southeastern United States found that disproportionality was “substantially less pronounced in Montessori settings” (Brown and Steele). The Montessori Method designs with the social-emotional needs of students at the forefront, and thus The Sojourner Truth School has made personal and community development foundational elements of its design. Truth puts an emphasis on self-development (one of its four core values), with each student getting a personal mentor teacher that coaches him or her through goal setting, creation and implementation of plans, and self-monitoring and reflection. Students are deliberately given specific and important roles in the community, whether during academic tasks or public-facing enterprise work, and provided with consistent feedback and opportunities to self assess with respect to their fulfillment of responsibilities.

Even as DCPS has made well-intended efforts to motivate students and make them feel more welcome at school, student satisfaction surveys continue to disappoint. For each of the four years in which DCPS has collected data for its annual Stakeholder Survey, results have shown a consistent drop in satisfaction between elementary school and middle school, and then again from middle school to high school. Initiatives for increasing satisfaction, such as an increased monetary investment in clubs, extracurriculars, and field trips, have had mixed results. Middle school student satisfaction grew by 2% between 2015 and 2016, only to drop by 3% in 2017 (DCPS 2017 Stakeholder Survey Results). Mayor Bowser and interim DCPS Chancellor Alexander both expressed continued commitment and resolution to invest in strategies to raise student and family satisfaction, but thus far have not been able to demonstrate significant growth. Truth has used empirical research around student motivation and adolescent development to advance a model rooted in key learning and engagement levers such as intrinsic rewards, student choice, and agency. Research from Kevin Rathunde compared middle school students in Montessori programs with students in traditional middle schools, and found significantly higher student motivation among Montessori students. Rathunde writes, “There were strong differences suggesting that Montessori students were feeling more active, strong, excited, happy, relaxed, sociable, and proud while engaged in academic work. They were also enjoying themselves more, they were more interested in what they were doing, and they wanted to be doing academic work more than the traditional students” (Rathunde, 2003).

The aforementioned systems and initiatives implemented by DCPS and other districts or schools trend towards common progressive educational ideals such as student-centered classrooms, social-emotional learning, or non-traditional daily schedules. None of these initiatives, however, represents a truly new or radical approach because they are layered on top of traditional school infrastructures rather than disrupting the foundational structure itself. Further, when deconstructed and examined as a collection of design and educational principles, they begin to look very similar to the Montessori Method. The Montessori Method has been effective across socioeconomic strata and learning styles and around the world for over a century (Lillard, 2017). **As a public Montessori middle and high school in Washington, D.C., The Sojourner Truth School will positively transform the educational experience for students and families around the District, and will serve as a national model for what an effective 21st century secondary school can look and feel like.**

### **The Sojourner Truth School Difference**

Sojourner Truth, for whom The Sojourner Truth School is named, is the inspiration for both the school's core values and also its overall approach to active learning. Born into slavery, Sojourner Truth escaped to freedom with her daughter and later also gained freedom for her son when she became the first Black woman to sue a slave owner for the freedom of a child and win. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, she advocated fiercely for not only abolition but also women's suffrage. Having never learned to read or write, she nevertheless became a formidable speaker and campaigner on a national level. She actively recruited Black troops for the Union Army, and after the war she came to Washington, DC to work with the Freedman's Bureau, where she advocated forcefully for land grants for former slaves and eventually also for prison reform and prisoner's rights (Painter, 2018). Throughout her life, she made an example of fostering community, identifying injustice, actively pursuing positive change, and always evolving and growing as an individual.

The Sojourner Truth School draws direct inspiration from Sojourner Truth, and stands prepared to achieve its mission and meet the needs of DC's diverse learners by adhering closely to the following core values:



**Honor self-development**



**Design for positive impact**



**Pursue justice everywhere**



**Challenge the mind, body, and soul**

The meaning and expectations for each core value have been articulated in The Truth Competency Framework. As discussed further in *Chapter B: Education Plan*, this framework is informed by and aligned to rigorous standards, and uses the CCSS and others to define expectations at each grade level for academic skills such as *examining choices in text structure*, and it also describes competencies in support of each of Truth's four core values. The ability to *reflect and self-monitor*, for example, has been defined as a competency in direct

support of the core value to **Honor Self Development**. An abridged competency band for this skill is included here as an example, and the entire framework can be reviewed in the appendix:

Skill	Grade 6	Grade 8	Grade 10	Grade 12
Reflect and Self-Monitor	<p>Can independently assess whether a task has been completed or not.</p> <p>When given pathway options, can choose the one which most appropriate for completing a task.</p> <p>Can estimate how long a task will take, with just justification.</p>	<p>Can break a task into composite parts, and create realistic goals for how long each part should take.</p> <p>Can create a plan, including a timeline, that describes how and when a task can be completed.</p> <p>Is able to reference the plan when describing where he or she is in the process of completion.</p> <p>Can reflect on productivity levels and the effect a given amount of work has on the likelihood of work progressing according to the plan.</p>	<p>Can break a complex task or project into composite parts, and create realistic goals for how long each part should take.</p> <p>Creates a multi-stage plan with benchmarks for what success should look like at each stage.</p> <p>When new information is provided or the expectations for the task change, he or she can adjust the plan accordingly.</p> <p>Regularly reflects on productivity and makes adjustments to increase or continue productivity (without the need for external redirection).</p> <p>Uses a tool or system to track or monitor personal productivity.</p>	<p>References a multi-stage plan with benchmarks for what success when reflecting on current status. Regularly updates the plan, as appropriate, in light of current status.</p> <p>When new information is provided or the expectations for the task change, he or she adjusts the plan accordingly.</p> <p>Regularly reflects on productivity and always makes adjustments to increase or continue productivity (without the need for external redirection).</p> <p>Uses a tool or system to track or monitor personal productivity</p>

*Figure 6: Excerpt from The Truth Competency Framework*

As a Montessori school, there are three key Montessori principles that The Truth School will employ to foster competency in each core value:

- 1. Meaningful Work with Real Life Application**
- 2. Extended, Multi-Age, Self-Directed Learning Blocks**
- 3. Deliberate Design of the Learning Environment**

While each principle might be considered an innovation in certain schools and districts, they are foundational parts of the Montessori method and have been implemented with positive results over the past 100 years and in 110 different countries.

These Montessori principles will provide the foundations for Truth to raise overall achievement in both ELA and math while also closing achievement gaps, promoting self-confidence and social emotional well-being, minimizing suspensions, increasing both student satisfaction and attendance, and achieving its mission by ensuring that graduates embody the Truth’s four core values.

**Meaningful Work with Real Life Application**

Traditional schooling is often separated from life contexts and real-world application both physically and conceptually. Physically, students are taught in a building that is dedicated solely to school and teaching, and

so any lesson with direct application - such a math workshop on budgeting - is learned in an artificial context rather than in an accountant's office or at a kitchen table. Studies show that even when middle school students are given "real-world" projects, they are fully aware of when their work is being manufactured to satisfy their math teacher versus when it is actually being used for a practical purpose (Barnes and Urbankowski, 2014). Montessori philosophy overcomes these physical and conceptual limitations by putting a premium on meaningful work done in context.

By Truth's third year of implementation, middle school students will participate firsthand in public-facing micro-economies which involve real work and real money. Students working one morning per week with the urban farm will not only participate in planting, maintenance, and harvesting in the garden, but also in the marketing, promotion, website administration, and business management that goes into selling crops at the farmer's market. Experiences with the farm will provide extensive opportunity for meaningful work in context, as math lessons can have direct connection to the farm's accounting, and chemistry lessons will be critically important to soil science and crop yield. Other enterprises might include a public-facing bicycle maintenance shop, and students working one morning per week here will not only experience the hands-on physical work of repairing bikes, but also customer service and the cost-benefit analysis of investing in new materials, tools, and repair stands. When it comes to the application of skills covered in lessons, teachers at Truth will not need to invent ways to feign authenticity, as the very real and meaningful context of their students' micro-economies will be readily available.



Further, work in enterprises will directly connect students to community issues and provide opportunities for identifying and solving local problems with their passion projects. Students working on the farm and selling goods at weekend farmers markets, for example, may begin not only to recognize the food deserts that exist in wards 5, 7, and 8, but also design and implement action plans to improve access to healthy food for neighbors living in these areas. Students working in the bike maintenance shop will become much more aware of transportation, safety, traffic, and environmental issues that affect not just commuters but all DC residents.



High School students at Truth will take the next step in meaningful and real work by participating two half-days per week in an off-site professional internship. Each student will have a unique internship aligned to her or his personal career interests, as expressed in the annual family goal-setting meeting and also during regular mentor check-ins. These internships will not only provide students with professional experience and the opportunity to deeply explore a career and industry about which they are passionate, but they will provide context for aspects of learning that are occurring back on campus. A student that is passionate about science and thus interning in a water treatment facility will see first-hand the purpose for learning about filtration and chemical processes, while her peer that is interested in business may be interning at an accounting firm and having a parallel experience learning the application of exponential functions when working through the compound interest owed out to investors on corporate bonds. Internships will also offer students meaningful opportunities to apply the self-direction and work management skills they have been working on and upon which they have been receiving feedback throughout



their time at Truth. Truth’s internship coordinator will manage communication between student mentors at school and the off-site professional facilitators and managers of each student’s internship in order to align expectations and feedback to The Truth Competency Framework for academic skills and core values.

### **Extended, Multi-Age, Self-Directed Learning Blocks**

Montessori programs promote student choice and a level of control with clear and definite limits. Modern research in psychology supports a link between models supporting student choice and positive learning outcomes (Marshall, 2017). There is overwhelming, long-established empirical evidence that supports the idea that both children and adults learn best when there is an element of choice and when the locus of control is intrinsic rather than extrinsic (Mizener and Williams, 2009, Perlmutter and Monty, 1977, and Crandall and Lacey, 1972). Having a sense of control has been shown to increase the performance of both adults and children, with children showing the strongest benefits (Patall, Cooper, & Robinson, 2008). One way that Truth aims to support student control and agency is with extended, multi-age work time blocks.



During these extended blocks, students will be supported by a mentor as they move towards increased self-direction, setting goals and designing personal learning plans for the day and week. Control and agency relate directly to Truth’s core value of Honoring Self-Development and Designing for Positive Impact, and students, their families, and their mentors will have regular opportunities to reflect on growth with respect to Truth’s competency rubric for these value-based skills. For example, setting goals, reflecting and self-monitoring, and valuing personal achievement are each core skills for the Honoring Self Development competency. Likewise, identifying community needs and framing problems, generating a plan to help solve a problem, and implementing a plan are each core skills for the Designing for Positive Impact competency.



Peer learning and extensive social interaction are fundamental aspects of Montessori education, and students will have structured opportunities to collaborate with peers throughout their self-directed work blocks. Rather than organizing students into narrow bands based on age level or tracking by ability level, Montessori philosophy encourages a significant investment of time in multi-age and multi-level groups. These opportunities to explore and learn in structured environments are extremely important during the adolescent years, when research in psychology shows that students are developing their identities and the skills necessary for navigating increasingly complex social environments (Kroger, 2017). These multi-age Montessori settings are particularly conducive to peer tutoring, which studies show are directly related to increased achievement (Lillard, 2017). In studies on Reciprocal Peer Tutoring (RPT), for example, students randomly assigned to RPT groups for math support consistently showed higher levels of math achievement than those that spent time in support sessions utilizing traditional instruction (Fantuzzo and Ginsburg-Block, 1998). These concepts of identifying community needs and supporting peers are fundamental aspects of multi-age level groups in Montessori philosophy, and also directly support the Truth core value of Pursuing Justice Everywhere.



## Deliberate Design of the Learning Environment

The learning environment refers not just to the physical, but also the social and curricular. Physical workspaces at Truth will be set up strategically to support collaborative engagement opportunities, with specifically designed collaboration-stations for RPT and other peer-to-peer interaction. There will be careful attention to classroom and hallway aesthetics, with the goal of creating ordered spaces where interest is drawn not to flashy diagrams or posters on the walls but rather to the academic work and ideas at hand. There is evidenced-based research that suggests that visually distracting workspaces “can affect children’s ability to maintain focused attention during instruction and to learn the lesson content.... Children were more distracted by the visual environment, spent more time off task, and demonstrated smaller learning gains when the walls were highly decorated than when the decorations were removed” (Fisher, Godwin, & Seltman, 2014). Walls at Truth will be decorated, but in the non-distracting aesthetic of an office or other professional space.

When it comes to curriculum, Truth puts an intentional priority on advancing critical academic skills and habits of learning rather than on breadth of content. The Montessori approach to curriculum for adolescents gives students the opportunity to deeply pursue specific issues and topics about which they are personally most passionate. Montessori education capitalizes on what psychological researchers call “topic interests” that have broad appeal across society, but also on “personal interests” that are subjective and less universal. Studies show that adolescents’ academic motivation generally decreases over their time spent in traditional schools, but Truth believes it can combat this and is informed by research showing that “interest and goals have been identified as two important motivation variables that impact individuals’ academic performances,” (Hoffman and Haussler, 1998, Hidi and Harackiewicz, 2000). In a seminal study done with middle school math students where all were presented with a lesson on fractions, the group given contexts with irrelevant interests averaged 2 out of 11 correct, those with no contexts averaged 3.5 out of 11, and those with contexts personalized to their interests averaged 6 out of 11 (Anand and Ross, 1987). It follows, then, that in order to optimize learning, students should be given the opportunity to learn in the context of topics for which they have personal and vested interests.



Informed by this research, The Truth School will utilize both topic interests and personal interests to build overall engagement. Middle school STEM classes, for example, will expose students to topics like flight and space, which have broad appeal, in order to provide the context for learning ratios and unit rates. Students at Truth will also explore specific community problems or issues of their personal interests by conducting passion projects (see the sample Humanities passion project detailed in *Chapter B* on page 51, for example). Projects will typically address a specific area of need and interest in the community, which will involve deep research around not only the issue itself but also the dynamics of power within the community of stakeholders that are affected.



Truth will put a diminished emphasis on extrinsic rewards and motivation, which are typically commonplace in non-Montessori educational environments. Students in non-Montessori settings are often awarded things like pizza parties for making the honor roll, field trips for perfect attendance, or gold stars for effort. Even traditional grades like As, Bs, and Cs, while designed to be measurements and indications of mastery, can be interpreted or even intentionally used as rewards for doing well or as punitive consequences for performing poorly. The Montessori Method advances the principle that

extrinsic rewards are obstructive to student learning, and modern research supports this philosophy (Pink, 2009). While extrinsic motivators tend to work with students in the short term, they often lead to students associating their actions with the reward rather than the learning or other natural consequence that resulted. Studies show that students' intrinsic motivation in school declines every year over the course of traditional schooling, and strongly suggests schools' heavy reliance on extrinsic motivators as a factor (Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005)



Truth has designed its approach to emphasize self-development and to put a premium on competency skills such as personal goal-setting, reflection and self-monitoring, valuing personal achievement, implementing self-designed plans, and cultivating joy and self worth (see the Truth Competency Framework in the appendix). When students are given the opportunity to consistently reflect on personal progress, to make connections between their learning and their achievement of personal goals, and to celebrate personal successes, the motivation to be in school and to learn becomes more intrinsic and thus more effective in the long-term. Studies show, for example, that students who engage in self-reflection activities on a regular basis show greater improvement in academic performance than their peers that do not engage in the activities (Lew, Magdeleine D. & Schmidt, Henk D., 2011). Research from Robert Marzano demonstrates that, on average, the practice of having students track their own progress is associated with gains of 32 percentile points (Marzano, 2009). Data also suggests that schools that put a priority on social-emotional learning have positive attendance and behavioral outcomes as well (Hinton, 2016).

### **The Student and Stakeholder Landscape**

Those familiar with the Montessori Method know that it is extremely refined and prescriptive for primary, lower elementary, and upper elementary programs. When it comes to middle and high school programs, however, there is an abundance of research-based philosophy but also room for adaptation based on community and need. This allows Truth to be data-driven not only with its approach to the metrics of the DC PCSB's Performance Management Framework, but also when guiding students towards the embodiment of The Sojourner Truth School core values: (1) honor self development, (2) design for positive impact, (3) pursue justice everywhere, and (4) challenge the mind, body, and soul. While these values are compatible with Montessori philosophy, they were developed independently by members of The Sojourner Truth School's Design Team and Academic Committee, made up of teachers, parents, and leaders working to identify meaningful values that will engender realization of Truth's mission. This adaptable nature of Montessori adolescent philosophy allows Truth to build a culture, curriculum, and schedule with the demographic, political, geographic, and economic landscapes of Washington, DC in mind. Stakeholders in The Sojourner Truth School believe that the model Truth has developed will positively impact student investment, and result in increased attendance and achievement.

Truth's Design Team, Board of Trustees, and Founding Team are described in more detail in *Chapter 3: Management Plan*, but it is worth mentioning here the depth of experience that members bring with both public middle and high school students and families across DC and also public, urban Montessori education in DC. Truth's Board Chair has spent the last eight years in DC working as the Director of The Maya Angelou Young Adult Learning Center and then as DCPS's Deputy Chief of Graduation Excellence. Other Board

members include the founding (and current) principal of Ron Brown College Preparatory High School in DCPS, the executive director of Thurgood Marshall Academy PCS, a past principal from E.L. Haynes PCS, and two nationally recognized leaders in promoting equity in educational organizations. The Design Team includes three executive directors from DC public Montessori elementary schools, eight active DCPS and DC PCS teachers, and the researcher and author of six published studies on the Montessori Method’s efficacy at closing gaps in achievement in urban districts. Truth’s acting executive director, founding principal, and founding instructional coach bring a combined thirty-three years of total experience in urban, public, Title 1 schools, with eighteen years in the classroom and fifteen years in school leadership. Seventeen of the founding team’s combined years of experience have come with student populations of above 45% English language learners (ELLs), and fifteen years of demonstrated achievement growth using personalized and competency-based instruction.

Citywide PARCC data indicates that a majority of students in Washington, DC are achieving below the expectations for their grade level on the PARCC exam in both ELA and math (see Figure 7 below):

PARCC RESULTS SY2017-2018							
		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4 (proficient)	Level 5	Level 4/5
DC overall	ELA	23%	21%	23%	27%	7%	34%
	math	19%	27%	24%	25%	5%	30%
6th grade	ELA	18%	26%	25%	24%	7%	31%
	math	21%	30%	26%	20%	4%	24%
7th grade	ELA	21%	18%	22%	26%	13%	39%
	math	17%	32%	26%	22%	3%	25%
8th grade	ELA	23%	20%	24%	25%	8%	33%
	math	39%	24%	18%	18%	2%	20%
High School	ELA II	37%	16%	17%	21%	9%	30%
	geometry	20%	47%	22%	10%	1%	11%

Figure 7: Overall PARCC results SY2017-2018

PARCC data also demonstrates that achievement gaps remain pervasive. Significant gaps exist between Hispanic and White students, Black and White students, students with disabilities (SWDs) and their non-disabled peers, English language learners (ELLs) and their non-ELL peers, males and females, and students designated as “at-risk” and their peers (DCPS PARCC 2018 Final Results):

Achievement gaps in DCPS schools during SY2017-2018 (% of students meeting or exceeding expectations)					
	PARCC ELA	PARCC math		PARCC ELA	PARCC math
SWD and non-SWD peers	25.4%	23.6%	Male and female	12.5%	3.0%
ELL students and non-ELL peers	11.3%	6.9%	Black students and White students	65.4%	63.1%
Students with “at-risk” designation and their peers	19.0%	17.1%	Hispanic students and White students	51.3%	49.6%

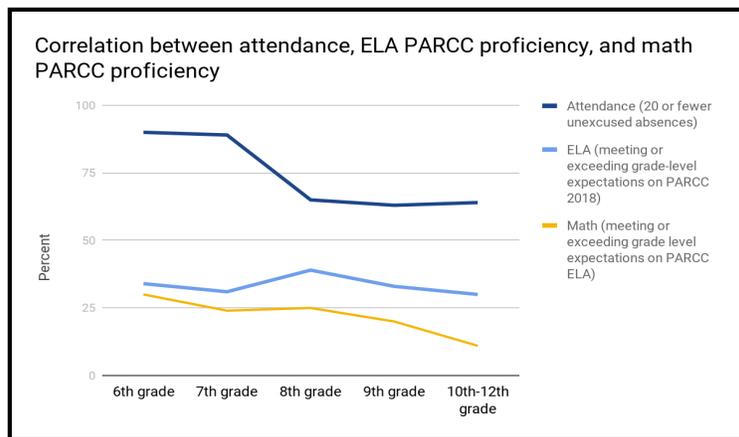
Figure 8: Achievement gaps in DCPS for SY2017-2018 (per “DCPS PARCC 2018 Final Results” release)

There is a significant drop in math performance over time as students move from 6th grade to high school geometry, and a similar drop in ELA performance as students move from middle school to high school (see Figure 7 above). During this same time period, truancy rates increase consistently, with 25% of students incurring 11 or more unexcused absences in 6th grade and eventually 55% of students incurring 11 or more unexcused absences during 10th-12th grades (see Figure 9 below):

DCPS Truancy Data (SY2017-2018)				
Grade	1-5 unexcused absences	6-10 unexcused absences	11-20 unexcused absences	21+ unexcused absences
6th	44%	20%	15%	10%
7th	45%	19%	14%	11%
8th	45%	19%	15%	35%
9th	23%	16%	19%	37%
10th-12th	23%	15%	19%	36%

**Figure 9:** DCPS Truancy data SY2017-2018

Truth’s team believes that achievement and attendance are correlated, and that decreases in achievement through middle school and high school are directly related to overall decreases in motivation and disinterest in school (see Figure 10 below).



**Figure 10:** Attendance and PARCC proficiency (attendance results taken from DCPS, ELA and math PARCC scores DC-wide from results.osse.dc.gov)

**Most importantly, Truth believes that this trend can be reversed and that high levels of student motivation and interest can be maintained by designing around the research-supported Montessori tenets that were described earlier this chapter: (1) learning in meaningful context, (2) self-directed learning blocks that promote student control and agency, and (3) deliberately designing the learning**

**environment.** Support for this can be found both in research on how the Montessori approach can effectively close gaps while still increasing achievement for all subgroups, and also in the aforementioned DC data showing that middle school students at CHM@L significantly outperformed their average DCPS peers in both ELA and math (Lillard, Heise, Ichev, Tong, Hart, & Bray, 2017).

Investment will increase as students at The Sojourner Truth School consistently get opportunities to learn with purpose and engage in meaningful work. Real money will be exchanged as students sell the goods from their urban farm at the weekend farmer’s market, or when they invest in capital expenditures such as bike racks for their bicycle maintenance business. During STEM class, their lessons on linear functions will become more purposeful because they will be looking for the optimal profit point as they use a quadratic function to model profit at different selling prices. Their persuasive essays in Humanities will be more meaningful when they are drafting arguments for why shoppers should purchase from their farmstand and market rather than another, and when these essays are published on the enterprise’s website for the world to see.

Truth believes it can maintain high levels of student motivation and interest by designing around the research-supported Montessori tenets of learning in meaningful context, encouraging student control and agency, and deliberately designing the learning environment.

Investment will also rise due to the increased level of control that students will have over their learning. They will be coached through the creation of their own personal learning plans on a daily basis during their self-directed work periods, and can thus leverage their affinities for particular learning styles by seeking out the opportunities that suit them best. Students will engage in a deep-dive passion project each term that allows them to practice a predetermined skill (such as creating a claim and counterclaim) while exploring a topic of their choice. During their “Communities” project in Humanities, for example, one 8th grade student may choose to write her expository essay on the Brookland neighborhood in the 1990s, while a peer writes his expository essay on the experience of Central American immigrants in the United States during the Trump presidency. Truth’s high degree of personalized instruction lends itself to seamless support for students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and for ELLs with language acquisition needs. All students at Truth - and not just those with traditionally categorized needs - will be working in flexible groups and with personalized learning plans during extended work blocks, and so SPED teachers and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers can seamlessly and directly support students in an inclusive environment.

The following campuses were selected as comparable schools based on programs offered, location, school type, or a combination of those factors, and were used to create the anticipated student population presented later in Figure 12:

School 1		Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan		
<i>Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan is considered a comparable school because of its Montessori program and its inclusion of a middle school.</i>				
Ward & Cluster	School Type	Enrollment	Low-Income	
Ward 6, ANC 6C	DCPS	361	37%	
Black	Hispanic / Latino	White	Asian	Other
60%	3%	30%	<1%	6%
Special Education: 7.2%				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	English Learners
92%	8%	0%	0%	1%
<i>*All of the data above is from OSSE's 2016-2017 Equity Report; All PARCC data below is from results.osse.dc.gov</i>				
Proficiency on PARCC - ELA	Proficiency on PARCC - Math	Growth on PARCC Assessment - ELA	Growth on PARCC Assessment - Math	
36%	31%	-10% from 2017 to 2018	-12% from 2017 to 2018	

School 2		Shining Stars Montessori Academy PCS		
<i>Shining Stars PCS is considered a comparable school due to its Montessori program and its geographic location.</i>				
Ward & Cluster	School Type	Enrollment	Low-Income	
Ward 5, ANC 5B	DC PCS	203	43%	
Black	Latino	White	Asian	Other
60%	3%	30%	0%	6%
Special Education: 10.4%				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	English Learners
86%	10%	0%	5%	10%
<i>*All of the data above is from OSSE's 2016-2017 Equity Report; All PARCC data below is from results.osse.dc.gov</i>				
Proficiency on PARCC - ELA	Proficiency on PARCC - Math	Growth on PARCC Assessment - ELA	Growth on PARCC Assessment - Math	
38%	17%	-5% from 2017 to 2018	-12% from 2017 to 2018	

School 3		Lee Montessori PCS		
<i>Lee Montessori is considered a comparable school due to its Montessori program and its geographic location.</i>				
Ward & Cluster	School Type	Enrollment	Low-Income	
Ward 5, ANC 5E	PCS	145	27%	
Black	Latino	White	Asian	Other
40%	6%	42%	3%	8%
Special Education: 20.7%				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	English Learners
60%	10%	3%	27%	0%
<i>*All of the data above is from OSSE's 2016-2017 Equity Report; All PARCC data below is from results.osse.dc.gov</i>				
Proficiency on PARCC - ELA	Proficiency on PARCC - Math	Growth on PARCC Assessment - ELA	Growth on PARCC Assessment - Math	
39%	22%	N/A	N/A	

School 4		DC International PCS (DCI)		
<i>DCI is considered a comparable school due to the grade levels that it serves, and its nature as a secondary school with a program-specific pipeline</i>				
Ward & Cluster	School Type	Enrollment	Low-Income	
Ward 4, ANC 4A	PCS	520	51%	
Black	Latino	White	Asian	Other
35%	40%	15%	3%	6%
Special Education: 16%				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	English Learners
11%	29%	57%	4%	9%
<i>*All of the data above is from OSSE's 2016-2017 Equity Report; All PARCC data below is from results.osse.dc.gov</i>				
Proficiency on PARCC - ELA	Proficiency on PARCC - Math	Growth on PARCC Assessment - ELA	Growth on PARCC Assessment - Math	
55%	38%	1% from 2017 to 2018	-3% from 2017 to 2018	

School 5		Brookland Middle School		
<i>Brookland Middle School is considered a comparable school due to the grade levels that it serves and its geographic location.</i>				
Ward & Cluster	School Type	Enrollment	Low-Income	
Ward 5, ANC 5B	PCS	254	100%	
Black	Latino	White	Asian	Other
91%	7%	2%	<1%	0%
Special Education: 20.5%				
Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	English Learners
37%	31%	12%	21%	6%
<i>*All of the data above is from OSSE's 2016-2017 Equity Report; All PARCC data below is from results.osse.dc.gov</i>				
Proficiency on PARCC - ELA	Proficiency on PARCC - Math	Growth on PARCC Assessment - ELA	Growth on PARCC Assessment - Math	
13%	5%	+2% from 2017 to 2018	+2% from 2017 to 2018	

Figure 11: Comparable school data profiles

In school year 2016-2017, 14% of total DCPS students had Individualized Education Plans, 12% were English language learners, and 77% either received free or reduced lunch, were eligible for TANF or SNAP benefits, were identified as homeless, or were under the care of CFSA.

Given the demographics of the current public charter and DCPS Montessori elementary schools, a likely location in or near Ward 5, the programmatic aspect of the model (Montessori), and the significant number of students that will be recruited from all over the city and enrolled off of the lottery, we anticipate the following student population:

Race/Ethnicity					Special Education: 18%				English Learners	Low Income
AA / Black	Hispanic / Latino	White	Asian	Other	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4		
67%	15%	15%	2%	1%	55%	25%	15%	5%	15%	70%

**Figure 12:** Projected student population

These projections emphasize the need not only for comprehensive special education and ELL supports, but also wrap-around systems and supports for other under-resourced groups of students such as those that are homeless or under the care of CFSA, receiving free or reduced lunch, TANF, or SNAP benefits. As demonstrated in the staffing model and budget workbooks detailed in *Chapters B* and *C* of the application, Truth is putting a priority on a robust student support team that will include not just SPED teachers, ESL teachers, and guidance counselors but also numerous social workers, classroom aides, and in-residence counselors from Dharma Yoga DC that specialize in community-building and restorative practices. In addition, the Montessori Method’s focus on personalization, self-development, and social-emotional learning make it an excellent and holistic approach for meeting the needs of unique and diverse learners. The data from Latin American Montessori Bilingual (LAMB), for example, is informative with respect to how successful a Montessori approach can be with English language learning students. Over 40% of students at LAMB are English learners, and yet 60% of LAMB students achieved at proficient or above in PARCC ELA in 2018. Lasalle-Backus Elementary, a non-Montessori DCPS school also in Ward 5, has a similar percentage of English learners (36%), but only 19% of Lasalle-Backus students achieved at proficient or above in PARCC ELA in 2018. Truth will ensure that each and every student - EL, SWD, high-poverty, or otherwise - has a teacher that serves as her or his personal mentor and coach, a curriculum that is responsive to her or his interests and personal competency levels, and direct support in self-development (including the recognition of internal and external triggers and development of strategies to mitigate their effects).

Using ELA and math proficiency data from the comparable schools in Figure 11, it is anticipated that about 40% of students enrolling at The Sojourner Truth School will have met or exceeded expectations in ELA and that about 30% will have met or exceeded expectations in math at their previous elementary school. Truth will be responsive to these needs by including a data-driven approach in its Montessori model, and to having not only a rigorous and relevant curriculum but also a plan for providing remediation for the significant number of students that will be enrolling at Truth having not met grade level expectations in their prior setting. The extended, multi-age learning blocks, combined with small group instructional opportunities and blended learning, will be ideal for personalized interventions such as Read 180 and i-Ready math workshops (see more details on academic interventions in *Chapter B: Education Plan*). The Truth team also anticipates around 80%

of its inaugural class enrolling without any prior Montessori experience. The largest number of these students will be in the 6th grade cohort, as most upper-elementary Montessori programs, such as those at Shining Stars PCS and Lee PCS, include a 6th grade class and thus do not transition students to middle school until 7th grade. This gives Truth the opportunity to design acculturation experiences that are specific to 6th graders, who will receive extra support with respect to goal-setting, the creation of personal learning plans, and self-monitoring. These 6th graders will begin their year with heavily structured extended work periods, and will have a slow-release into increased self-direction.

### PART 3: Recruitment and Retention

Initial discussion and plans for The Sojourner Truth School arose from conversations between parents, teachers, and leaders of the current Washington, DC Montessori community. Catalyzed by discussions with parents who expressed a desire for a Montessori pathway that could continue through the 12th grade, teachers and leaders from Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan, Lee Montessori, and Breakthrough Montessori began meeting in the fall of 2016 to begin drafting what would become the mission and vision for The Sojourner Truth School. Since then, the Design Team has expanded significantly to include staff and parents from Latin American Montessori Bilingual (LAMB), Shining Stars Montessori PCS, and other non-Montessori DCPS and PCS schools. Staff and parents from each of these settings continue to be a driving force of influence on and enthusiasm for the design of The Sojourner Truth School (see parent letters of support and Design Team resumes in the appendix for more information).

Truth’s Founding Design Team and its Academic Design Committee have both been meeting on a biweekly basis since the fall of 2017. These teams consist largely of teachers and leaders with extensive public school experience in DC, both in and out of Montessori environments. A core Parent Design Committee, made up of one parent from each of the public Montessori elementary schools, began meeting in September of 2018, and has met biweekly since then. Enthusiasm from team members has led to the creation of additional subcommittees as well, which focus on topics ranging from culture and discipline to general advocacy. More specific information on Truth’s Board of Trustees and various design teams can be found in *Chapter C: Management Plan*.

The Sojourner Truth School aims to be both a secondary school pathway for those families and students that are already part of a Montessori experience for elementary school, and also to provide a Montessori option for those without prior Montessori experience or familiarity. With this in mind, Truth has created the following enrollment projection:

Grade	Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4		Year 5		Year 6	
	Non-Montessori	Montessori experience										
6	60	5	68	7	75	10	85	10	75	10	65	10

	Rising from Truth	From Montessoris with a 6th grade class	Rising from Truth	From Montessoris with a 6th grade class	Rising from Truth	From Montessoris with a 6th grade class	Rising from Truth	From Montessoris with a 6th grade class	Rising from Truth	From Montessoris with a 6th grade class	Rising from Truth	From Montessoris with a 6th grade class
7		15	58	17	67	23	76	24	85	25	76	39
8			12		67		81		90		99	
9			15		26		75		100		110	
10					13		23		67		90	
11							12		21		60	
12									11		19	
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>		<b>177</b>		<b>281</b>		<b>386</b>		<b>484</b>		<b>568</b>	

*Figure 13: The Sojourner Truth School enrollment projection*

Truth strongly believes its model and approach will be transformative for students regardless of Montessori experience. It is projected that close to 80% of Truth students will come from non-Montessori backgrounds in year one and close to that for the following years as well (see Figure 13). While Truth stresses that its success is not at all contingent on the establishment of any kind of pattern, Truth acknowledges the deep investment that families at public Montessori schools, such as Breakthrough, Lee, LAMB, Shining Stars, and CHM@L, have already made in a Montessori education. Many of these families have students that have spent nine years in a Montessori environment and - alongside students without Montessori experience - Truth aims to provide them with continuity of pedagogy through 12th grade. To this end, and as the only public Montessori middle and high school in DC, Truth is exploring the possibility of establishing a feeder pattern to allow these families to continue with a Montessori program. Because Truth also aims to expand Montessori access to all families around the District regardless of experience, if this pattern is in fact established then Truth will commit to taking a maximum of 60% of students from its feeders in any given year, reserving a significant number of seats for open enrollment.

Based on both mission and enrollment projections, it will be integral that Truth successfully recruits families from outside of the current public Montessori community. While the waitlist data implies that there are a significant number of Montessori-friendly families that simply did not get a seat due to the lottery process, it will be important to promote Truth as an option for any and all families around DC that are seeking a personalized middle and high school experience designed specifically with the developmental needs of an adolescent in mind. The Truth team has conducted empathy interviews with non-Montessori middle and high school families representing five different DCPS schools, and data demonstrates that a majority of these non-Montessori families were unaware of Montessori as an approach or option. In almost every case, however, families did express interest in a personalized experience that prioritized self-development and choice with clear limits.

### **Recruitment Plan for non-Montessori Students**

Truth’s leadership team will implement the following plan for recruiting students without Montessori experience:

- In progress: Truth will continue to foster relationships it has built with non-Montessori schools such as Rocketship Public Schools (PCS) and Powell Elementary School (DCPS), making regular appearances at parent events and open houses
- April, 2019: Truth will use the OSSE list of contact information for school guidance counselors in order to reach out directly to every elementary school counselor in the District; counselors will be introduced to Truth’s vision, model, and plans to open in 2020; this initial touchpoint will also request the opportunity to be present at the schools’ open houses and family events in the fall of 2019
- October, 2019: Truth will be actively attending middle school open house events at elementary schools in each of DC’s eight wards; Truth leadership will be fostering relationships with leadership from elementary schools around the District in order to secure a presence at coffee-with-the-principal and other PTA-style events
- November, 2019: Truth will be holding its own open house events targeted at families without Montessori experience; these events will include an introduction to the Montessori Method
- December, 2019: Truth will promote at EdFest; continuation of open house events
- January - August, 2020: Truth’s promotion team will host two open houses info sessions per month, tailored to audience and based on level of experience and familiarity with Montessori (see Figure 14 below):

<b><i>Recruitment Effort and Timeline</i></b>	<b><i>Goal</i></b>	<b><i>Schools, students, and families WITH Montessori experience</i></b>	<b><i>Schools, students, and families WITHOUT Montessori experience</i></b>
<p>Continue to foster existing relationships with non-Montessori schools (such as Rocketship Public Schools and DCPS elementary schools)</p> <p><i>Ongoing</i></p>	<p>Promote Truth as an option for all students</p> <p>Increase the number of students at Truth that do not have prior Montessori experience</p>	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Present at parent events (and use non-Montessori vocabulary, as appropriate, to describe the program and make it relevant)</li> <li>● Explain why the Truth approach will be good for students coming from the specific background of the audience school setting (i.e. personalized, blended learning from Rocketship)</li> <li>● Reference established and successful examples of public Montessori middle and high schools with great post-secondary records (i.e. Clark Montessori in Cincinnati)</li> </ul>
<p>Communication with elementary school counselors</p> <p><i>April, 2019</i></p>	<p>Establish relationships and program legitimacy</p> <p>Create inroads to leverage later for more promotion</p> <p>Encourage counselors to recommend Truth as an option to all parents</p> <p>Encourage counselors to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Acknowledgement of recognized Montessori principles (i.e. meaning work), and what these will look like at the MS/HS level</li> <li>● Build off existing and established relationships with families from each school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Usage of non-Montessori vocabulary to describe the program (i.e. personalization, blended learning, authentic projects, self-direction)</li> <li>● Argue why the Truth approach will be good for <i>all</i> students</li> <li>● Encourage counselors to identify particular students and families to target for extra levels of promotion</li> <li>● Reference established and successful examples of public Montessori</li> </ul>

	identify particular students who would be ideal fits for the model		middle and high schools with great post-secondary records (i.e. Clark Montessori in Cincinnati)
Personal interactions on-site at elementary schools  <i>October, 2019</i>	Recruit students and parents for interest (and ideally verbal commitments) for enrollment  More names and info for contact lists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Description of how the Truth experience aligns and extends experiences from elementary school</li> <li>• Opportunities for students to follow personal interests in MS/HS (i.e. enterprises, passion projects)</li> <li>• Emphasis of how the Truth experience will be different than any other MS/HS experience in DC (student choice, personalization, holistic education)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directly address fears around lack of organization in Montessori by stressing the high level of structure that has gone into the design of extended work blocks and classroom experiences</li> <li>• Emphasize specific experiences and opportunities without over-stressing Montessori jargon</li> <li>• Find Montessori alums to give personal testimonies to their experience</li> <li>• How students new to Montessori will be supported</li> </ul>
Middle School Fair presentations at elementary schools  <i>October - December, 2019</i>	General promotion of Truth as an option  Getting more names for the contact list (and facilitating one-on-one conversations)  Differentiating Truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeting elements of Montessori that primary, early elementary, and upper elementary students most appreciate an focusing on what these will look like in MS and HS (i.e. student agency, freedom within limits, out-of-classroom experiences)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus on how an experience at Truth will be different than any other middle school options</li> <li>• No need to stress “Montessori vocabulary,” but rather focus on the actual experience and benefits</li> </ul>
Communication with elementary school leaders  <i>September - December, 2019</i>	Raise awareness of the school as an option  Foster relationships for student and family references moving forward  Encourage leaders to allow Truth to promote on-campus for future family events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressed familiarity with what the school is doing with respect to the Montessori method</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of recognized Montessori principles, and what these will look like at the MS/HS level</li> <li>• Build off established relationships with families</li> <li>• Discussion of mentorship programs (MS/HS-&gt;ES) and ways that Truth will support strong elementary programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usage of non-Montessori vocabulary to describe the program</li> <li>• Reference established and successful examples of public Montessori middle and high schools with great post-secondary records (i.e. Clark Montessori in Cincinnati)</li> <li>• Expressed familiarity of data-driven instruction (and other programmatic specialties that each school may have), and how Truth will support and extend this as students transition into MS</li> </ul>
ED Fest  <i>December, 2019</i>	Visibility and general promotion More names and info for contact list  Re-engage families that have had an initial touch from an open house or middle school fair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasize how Truth is different from the other schools presenting at Ed Fest</li> <li>• Stress the new elements of school that Montessori students will have access to in MS and HS (sports, content sessions, public-facing enterprises)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presence from a Montessori secondary alum (ex: Clark Montessori)</li> <li>• Avoid overuse of esoteric Montessori lingo; focus instead on description of core values, personalization, blended learning, passion projects, enterprises, and internships</li> <li>• Be prepared to pitch: What <i>is</i> Montessori? <i>Why</i> should I do Montessori instead of something else?</li> </ul>

<p>Open House presentations</p> <p><i>December, 2019 - August, 2020</i></p>	<p>On-site myschooldc applications at computer stations</p> <p>Verbal commitments</p> <p>More names and info for contact list</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Emphasis of how prior experiences will set them up for success</li> <li>● Mentorship from the advisory teacher and other systems of support during the ES→MS transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How students new to Montessori will be supported</li> <li>● Avoid overuse of Montessori lingo, but also explain to parents how this approach is different and how they'll be able to track their student's progress and support their student outside of school</li> </ul>
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**Figure 14:** Differentiation of recruitment events based on Montessori experience

An online form will be used to collect and maintain parent names, student names, parent email addresses, parent phone numbers, current school, and current elementary school teacher. Brief personal emails will be sent to invite parents to upcoming open house events, and text messages will be sent as a reminder three days prior to the event. The team will also commit to following up with each and every family with a personal phone call prior to each event and then again after events. At open house events, the team will have computers set up for myschooldc.org registration for those families ready to register.

In addition, the recruitment team will engage in a number of events and activities specifically designed to give students and families exposure to Montessori and some of the elements of the Truth model that make it different from other middle and high schools. Throughout SY2019-2020, Truth will run a series of student workshops that take place on the professional development days of the different charter Montessori schools and also DCPS. These workshops will be hosted in partnership with Lee Montessori for farm space, and will give participating students exposure to the kind of hands-on farm work with crops and chickens that they may experience at Truth. When venues permit, the recruitment team will also try to bring these experiences on the road so that students can hold chickens and receive mini-lessons in farm-to-table dining experiences.

Based on open house events that have been held at the elementary Montessori schools from October of 2018 through February of 2019 and empathy interviews with families from five non-Montessori DCPS schools, the most commonly asked questions have been:

- (1) Where will the school be located?
- (2) Will there be elective classes like art, language, and music?
- (3) Will there be sports teams?
- (4) What sort of supports do you have for students with IEPs?

These questions will thus inform promotional materials, which will also cover the general tenets of the Montessori Method, the specific innovations that make The Sojourner Truth School experience different from that at other schools, and general information regarding the school day and opportunities for things like sports and after-care.

Truth conservatively projects a retention rate of around 90% for each grade level, and will work to recruit students at each grade level as needed to maintain projected numbers. In order to do this, Truth will invest time and, when necessary, funds in general promotion opportunities such as advertisements to build awareness of unique aspects and innovations of the Truth program.

## PART 4: Community Input

Staff, parents, and leaders at each of the District’s public Montessori elementary schools (Shining Stars Montessori, Lee Montessori, LAMB, Breakthrough Montessori, and Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan) have been engaged directly via information sessions and encouragement to join one of Truth’s design teams. Truth has also built relationships where possible with non-Montessori schools such as Rocketship Public Schools and Powell Elementary School and has promoted opportunities for info sessions and design influence on parent listservs around the city. This has led to design committee made up of staff and parents from not only each of the District’s five public Montessori elementary schools but also non-Montessori DCPS and public charter schools.

Truth has built relationships with national Montessori networks, training centers, and accreditation entities. This includes the Association Montessori Internationale, the American Montessori Society (AMS), the North American Montessori Teachers Association (NAMTA), the Montessori Public Policy Initiative (MPPI), and the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS). These relationships will continue to grow, as the Truth team looks forward to benefiting from strong connections to Montessori trainers that support its vision for an urban, public adolescent program and more local opportunities for Truth teachers to earn Montessori diplomas.

Stakeholders and community groups that will be cultivated in the planning year will be guidance counselors and leadership from DC elementary schools, ANC leaders, professional industry contacts as potential internship hosts, potential community outreach partners (such as DC Scores, Dharma Yoga DC, Mary’s Center, and Zenith Arts), teacher development organizations such as Urban Teachers, local universities (such as Loyola University and its Montessori institute), and DC State Board of Education members. Once a facility location is identified, the Truth team will also prioritize engagement with local neighborhood residents, leaders, commercial enterprise managers, neighboring school leaders, and metro officials. Positive relationships with these neighborhood community members will be important not only because of the role and influence they exert on any school community, but particularly because Truth’s middle school enterprises will include public-facing micro-economies such as farmer’s markets with which it hopes the public will directly interact and patronize. Further, The Truth School’s model is built around students engaging directly with community issues, and so favorable interaction and neighborhood support will be integral to its success.

One of Truth’s core values is the pursuit of justice everywhere. As articulated in The Truth Competency Framework (see appendix), this means seeking to understand the full context of any issue, exploring the underlying dynamics of power, and then engaging effectively and directly by establishing and justifying a position that promotes equity. This core value is the frame by which students, staff, and all stakeholders will be expected to address issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, national origin, and religion.

Parents, leaders, and staff from all public Montessori elementary schools and many non-Montessori public schools in DC, as well as partners at AMI, NAMTA, AMS, and the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector, have directly influenced Truth’s model through active participation on design committees and

during feedback during info sessions. The composition of the committees has been diverse by design, and Truth’s founding team has made deliberate effort to include not only individuals that were already enthusiastic and passionate about the design process but also individuals that have historically played marginalized roles in their school communities. During the empathy interview process, for example, the interview team intentionally sought out students and parents that had experienced struggles with academic achievement, discipline, or attendance. These experiences, together with weekly design committee meetings and ongoing parent info sessions, have contributed significantly to Truth’s model and approach - from our Deep Dive Learning Cycles and the number of seat hours Truth high school students will experience for each class, to the inclusion of mindfulness exercises during middle school extended work blocks.

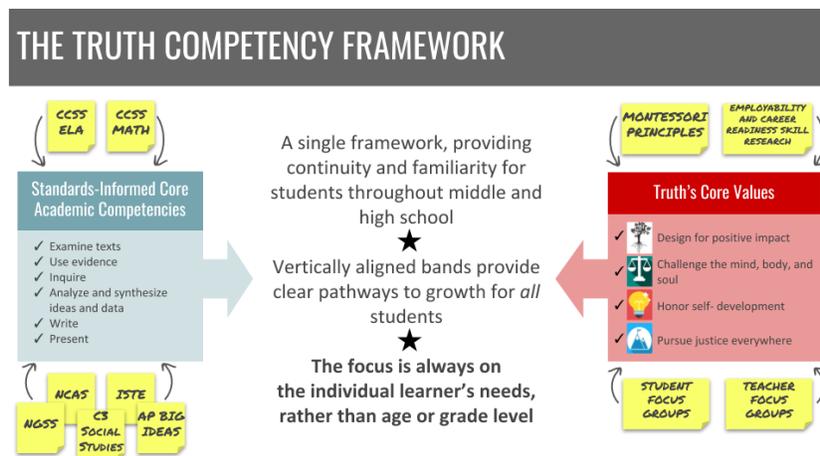
## B. Education Plan

### PART 1: Curriculum



The Sojourner Truth School believes firmly in the principles of backwards design, and particularly in the model of Schooling by Design presented by Wiggins and McTighe (2007). In accordance with this model, all aspects of The Sojourner Truth School are derived directly from Truth’s school mission. **Truth’s curriculum choices, culture plans, student and staff structures, design of professional learning communities, student and staff policies, and use of resources have all been deliberately selected to most effectively breathe life into the mission and truly empower Truth graduates to transform the world.**

Truth’s theory of change (see in appendix) envisions that the mission will be achieved when students fully embody Truth’s four core values: (1) honor self-development, (2) pursue justice everywhere, (3) design for positive impact, and (4) challenge the mind, body, and soul. The observable and measurable student behaviors that demonstrate these values can be found in the appendix in the Truth Competency Framework, and this framework will be the foundation for Truth’s assessment and student feedback systems.



*Figure 15: The key design elements of Truth’s Competency Framework*