MONTESSORI MAKERS GROUP

The Philosophy Doesn't Stop at the Classroom Door

Building Systems That Hold Your Whole School

Hannah Richardson | Montessori Makers Group | NJMAC 2026

An ordinary morning.

A guide needs a decision. The head is in a meeting.

No one knows who can act. So the work continues through checking, waiting and improvising.

What is the environment asking this adult to carry?

The Core Tension

IN THE CLASSROOM

Prepared environment.

Work cycle.

Careful sequencing.

Materials in their place.

Systems are sacred.

THE REST OF THE SCHOOL

Communication improvised per the situation.

Admissions can be informal.

Governance not always clear.

Onboarding inconsistent.

Systems? Optional.

We built an entire pedagogy around the power of structure — then forgot to apply it to ourselves.

On Paper, Everything Looks Fine

✓	✓	✓	✓
Strong enrollment	**Beautiful campus**	**Experienced guides**	**Believing families**
Waitlist in primary	Well-resourced	Long-tenured team	Deep community

And yet inside, the staff can be unraveling.

Faculty meetings may be tense. New hires may be burning out within a year. The head of school might be working 60-hour weeks and still falling behind.

She Said She Needed a Strategic Plan

The first need was a dependable way for work to move.

How does a parent raise a concern about a classroom?	*"It depends. Sometimes they email me, sometimes the guide, sometimes they catch me at pickup. There is no real process."*
How do faculty raise concerns about leadership decisions?	*"Honestly, they mostly don't. They either talk to each other or they leave."*
What is your admissions sequence?	*"After the tour, it kind of varies. Some get a trial day. Some just start the paperwork. If people don’t enroll, we aren’t sure why."*

A strategic plan could matter. These daily gaps needed attention first.

Imagine walking into a classroom where:

- Children are dysregulated
- The work cycle is falling apart
- Materials are missing or out of place
- Transitions are chaotic
- Guides are exhausted from constant redirection



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What would we say? We would say: the environment needs work. The systems are not in place.

Look at the Environment First

CLASSROOM

When a classroom is falling apart, we do not blame the children. We look at the environment. We ask what systems are missing.

THE SCHOOL

Before blaming the head, the guide or the board, ask: were expectations clear? Was support available? Could the person act?

Repair missing structure. Address harmful conduct. A systems lens does not remove accountability.

Why We Resist

Three honest reasons we don't apply the philosophy to ourselves

01

We associate systems with rigidity

We absorbed this from corporate culture and bureaucratic schools — the very things Montessori pushes back against. So "let's build a system" sounds cold. It sounds like the opposite of what we're trying to create.

02

Systems make assumptions visible

And when assumptions are visible, we find out colleagues were operating on completely different ones. Ambiguity is uncomfortable to dissolve — but ambiguity is the slow, low-grade dysfunction that eats schools alive.

03

We're already underwater

Nobody wants to add a project to the list. But the chaos is being caused, at least in part, by the absence of the systems. You keep doing more work to compensate for what should already be infrastructure.

Systems are not the opposite of warmth.



Systems are what make warmth sustainable.

A classroom with clear systems is not a cold classroom.

It is the warmest possible kind — because the children are not anxious.

They know what to expect. They are free to be present.

THE FIVE SYSTEMS

Where structure makes the difference



These are the areas I see schools struggle with again and again.

01 Communication

A Tuesday decision changes arrival. An absent guide follows the old routine Wednesday.

Decision: what changed, who approved it, and when does it begin?

One record: where can every affected adult find the current decision?

Return path: who answers questions, and where do unresolved concerns go?

Follow-through: did absent colleagues understand what changed?

Before calling it resistance, check whether the decision actually traveled.

Communication in a crisis

Think of a past or possible crisis at your school.

Who hears first? How does the message reach staff and families? Where could it stall?

What would you want to work differently?

02 Admissions & Enrollment

A family tours Friday. By Tuesday, two adults assume the other sent the application.

1	2	3	4	5	6
Inquiry received	Tour scheduled	Tour completed	Follow-up sent	Application offered	Contract signed

Give every handoff an owner, a next step and a due date. Completion means the family knows what happens next.

At Friday's review: which promised follow-ups happened, and which did not?

After the school tour

A family tours on Friday. What happens next?

Who owns the follow-up? Could a colleague find the next step if that person were away?

Where could a family be left waiting?

03 Faculty Support & Development

Onboarding	A new guide receives a key, a handbook and three different answers. Name a support person before day one.
Observation cadence	In the first month: observe, give timely feedback, and agree on the next step.
Performance concerns	Name the observed behavior, its impact, available support and the next review date.
Individual meetings	Schedule a short first-week check-in. Make ongoing support predictable, not crisis-triggered.

“Ask anyone” is not the same as a dependable support system.

A new colleague’s first week

Think of a new guide or assistant at your school.

Who helps them find answers and practice routines? What support arrives before they have to ask?

What should every new colleague be able to count on?

04 Governance

A parent contacts a board member about a guide. The board member promises to "sort it out."

Illustrative scenario: listening is not the same as owning the operational response.

Governance: policy, oversight and accountability.	Operations: school leadership and supervision.
A concern about the head needs an independent route.	Safety and reporting duties come first.

What does your board do?

Could you explain everything your board is responsible for?

Could your assistants or parents explain it too? Where would their answers differ?

What needs to be clearer, and where could people find it?

05 Family Communication

A concern at pickup becomes a group-chat story by evening. What happens next?

Acknowledge	A named person confirms who will respond and by when.
Follow through	Verify the facts. Share appropriately. Protect child and staff privacy.
Close the loop	Explain the next step if the concern remains unresolved. Urgent safety issues follow the required route.

When a parent raises a concern

A parent raises a concern at pickup. What happens next?

Who responds, by when, and how does the family know? What if the concern remains unresolved?

Could staff and parents describe the same process?

"But we're small.

We're a community.

We know each other."



Relationships matter. Continuity needs more than memory.

If you were unexpectedly away for two days:

What could someone find? What could they decide?

What would they escalate? What could safely wait?

Five Questions to Carry Back

Practical starting points for next week, not five new projects.

1. Where can staff find a decision and question it?
2. Where does a family's next step lose its owner?
3. What support does a new colleague receive before asking?
4. Which decisions belong to governance, and which to the head?
5. What can a family expect after raising a concern?

Choose one friction point. Name an owner, a small change and a review date.

What the Audit Helps Us See

A policy on paper is not the same as a routine people can use.

System	Running on improvisation	Partially documented	Clear & consistent
Communication	☐	☐	☐
Admissions & Enrollment	☐	☐	☐
Faculty Support	☐	☐	☐
Governance	☐	☐	☐
Family Communication	☐	☐	☐

We would observe.

We would prepare the environment.

We would make the next step clear.

For the school.

For the adults.

For ourselves.

The philosophy doesn't stop at the classroom door.

Session handout
For next week

NJMAC session survey

Thank you for joining me.

Scan to complete the survey and receive PD credit.

