

Program Planning Summary to the  
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education

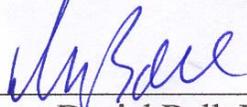
Establish the Center for Montessori Education

College of Education

Lander University

13 February 2006

Date of Submission



Daniel Ball, President

## **The Center for Montessori Education**

### **Designation as New Program proposal or Modification and number of credit hours in program or modification and proposed date of implementation:**

Lander proposes to establish its **Center for Montessori Education** in August of 2006. It has elected to submit this planning summary for review and approval by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, even though no State funds are being requested to establish or maintain the Center.

### **Justification of need for the proposed program:**

The state of South Carolina is facing a crisis in early childhood education. There are an estimated 28,000 four-year-olds in S.C. considered at-risk for academic failure. Lack of access to high quality early childhood education contributes to an achievement gap that places South Carolina at the bottom of national rankings on a variety of educational indicators including high school completion rates and S.A.T. scores. To meet this crisis we must identify models for high quality early childhood education and begin to offer professional development of teachers in their use. Montessori education is one such model. It has a hundred year track record and is the only early childhood curriculum that is globally recognized.

In the past thirty years Montessori education has sustained remarkable growth in the U. S. public school sector. In 1991 only one hundred school districts in the United States reported some type of Montessori program, and no public Montessori schools were yet in existence in South Carolina. Today, just fifteen years later, the *Public School Montessorian* reports over four thousand schools in its database. Over **twelve** South Carolina public school districts now offer Montessori programs, most offering instruction in multiple classrooms or school sites. At least three publicly funded schools in South Carolina have total Montessori programs. In 2001 Montessori was designated one of the early childhood curricula accepted by the SC Department of Education.

Interest in Montessori education is increasing. In 2005 and 2006 Governor Mark Sanford signed proclamations declaring the last week in February Montessori Education Week in South Carolina. Public school programs are met with overwhelming parental support. In 2003 two Montessori early childhood classrooms opened in Cherokee County School District One. Response was so positive that by 2005 they expanded to operate eight classrooms in three different schools. Laurens 55, the district with the longest lived public school program in the state now offers Montessori through middle school.

On a practical level, the greatest limiting factor for increasing Montessori classes is the availability of professionally prepared and certified teachers. The Lander University Montessori Teacher Education Program is the only university-based Montessori teacher preparation in South Carolina. In 1997 Lander first began offering Montessori teacher education courses; and in 2002 it became fully accredited and began an affiliation with the American Montessori Society. Accreditation was awarded by the Montessori Accrediting Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) for a seven year term. MACTE is one of only three accrediting agencies authorized by the USDOE to accredit teacher education programs, the other two being NCATE and TEAC.

### **Anticipated program demand and productivity:**

The **Center for Montessori Education** is not an academic program. Its goals are to provide professional development for educators working in or with Montessori programs and to sponsor, promote and disseminate research on Montessori education.

The Center will provide extensive education and professional development for Montessori classroom teachers, curriculum specialists and administrators. Since 2001, forty teachers have received AMS certification through Lander's Montessori Teacher Education Program. There are many more teachers who hold state licensure at the appropriate level, but no Montessori credential, teaching in Montessori classrooms throughout the state. These teachers have a need for Montessori-specific professional development. To be highly qualified, teachers need to be adept in the use of specialized Montessori didactic materials, be able to transmit knowledge about their use to children, and, most importantly, understand how these materials interface with SC curriculum standards.

Traditional venues for Montessori professional development, national and regional conferences, are offered in large cities and destination resorts. Rural areas, particularly those in the rural south, are underserved. Rural school districts that have only a few Montessori classrooms, or independent schools in small communities, are unable to provide specialized in-service for a handful of employees. In March 2004 Lander University sponsored an American Montessori Society Touring Symposium. Over seventy participants from five states traveled to Greenwood for this event. Lander's Montessori Education program has subsequently sponsored workshops and speakers in Greenwood, Laurens and Florence. Attendance has been strong and the response has been positive.

The Lander U. Montessori Teacher Education Program already works in close collaboration with many SC public school districts, as well as several independent schools. The **Center for Montessori Education** will build on these established relationships. We will assist schools as they identify areas of need for professional development through analysis of student test results, evaluations such as ECERS, teacher recertification requirements and the ability to recruit and retain paraprofessionals.

As Montessori programs expand, there is a growing need for outcomes based research. Much of the existing research, particularly studies of its use with low income students, is focused in northern urban settings. There is a dearth of applicable work on rural or southern children in Montessori. We propose to identify topics of research related to Montessori education, sponsor worthy projects and provide the tools to South Carolina Montessori teachers and others to engage in regular action research. We will also work with researchers from other SC institutions with an interest in Montessori outcomes. As objective data on effective practices is collected, a means of sharing that data with other educators is vital. Dissemination of our projects through conferences, seminars and an annual on-line journal will encourage dialogue among Montessori, other educators and the public. This will ultimately improve classroom practices and accountability, as well as provide data on which districts can make program planning decisions.

**Assessment of extent to which the proposed program duplicates existing programs in the state:**

No other university in South Carolina has a Montessori program or center. There will be no duplication of existing programs.

**Relationship of the proposed center to existing programs at the proposing institution:**

The **Center for Montessori Education** is not a new academic program. It will operate as part of the Department of Teacher Education within Lander's College of Education. Full-time and adjunct faculty who teach in the Montessori Teacher Education Program will participate in the center's professional development and research efforts.

We also anticipate a close working relationship with other departments within Lander University. For example, Spanish faculty in the Department of English and Foreign Languages are collaborating with the Montessori program to offer Spanish instruction to the children in our campus preschool program. Faculties from other divisions have frequently worked with education faculty to provide professional development in P-12 settings. These relationships will extend into the CME.

**Relationship of the proposed program to other institutions via inter-institutional cooperation:**

The proposed center will be administered solely through Lander University. It will not affect any existing inter-institutional programs.

**Total new costs associated with implementing the proposed program (general estimates only):**

We anticipate no new costs associated with implementing the Center for Montessori Education.



founded in 1872

LANDER UNIVERSITY

*Office of the President*

13 February 2006

Members, Commission on Higher Education, State of South Carolina

One of Lander University's unique and distinctive programs is its Montessori Teacher Education Program. One of a handful of nationally accredited Montessori programs, it deserves statewide, regionwide and national exposure.

By being granted the designation of the Center for Montessori Education, this university will be able to develop national stature in this field, attracting quality students, teachers and leaders to our institution and to our state.

The successes of Lander University's program demonstrated in this request, along with the goals and vision for the future show that the Center for Montessori Education at Lander University is most deserved.

I support this request enthusiastically, and I will use my office to ensure that the Center is worthy of the designation.

Cordially,

Daniel W. Ball  
President

DWB:csb