

# Montessori for Social Justice in Portland

**6th annual event draws more than 350 participants**



BY **TAMIKA CROSS**

Montessori for Social Justice (MSJ) partnered with Harmony Montessori School to host its 6th annual conference in Portland, Oregon this summer. This year's theme was "Decolonizing the Human Potential". More than 350 educators, school administrators, parents, social justice advocates, and volunteers convened on the Lewis and Clark College campus to learn, collaborate, and build social networks.

The MSJ conference began with two "pre-conference" affinity group gatherings that took place all day on June 20th. Participants could attend either Montessorians of the Global Majority or De-centering Whiteness retreats to experience deep, reflective preparation in self-identity work. The affinity group activities set the tone for the remaining days of the MSJ conference. In the following days, MSJ conference attendees were able to choose from 28 transformative breakout sessions, including one presented in Spanish, led by dynamic presenters from all over the North American continent. Our guest speaker, Robin Butterfield of the Winnebago/Chippewa Nation and President of the National Indian Education Association, gave an informative presentation on Guiding Principles in Teaching about Native Americans. The conference also arranged a special ceremony acknowledging Montessori

Elders of the Global Majority, who helped pave the way for many current Montessori educators.

There were many "firsts" during the Portland conference! MSJ and Embracing Equity co-hosted an evening showcase event on Friday, June 21st called, "Speaking for Ourselves," to promote the collaborative publication of the same title. The event showcased a select number of Montessorians who published poetry and other reflection pieces to read from the book to a live audience. Each conference attendee was able to receive the book as part of their registration. In addition to the readings, there was a special dance performance choreographed by dance artist, Mr. Bobby Fother and his dance troupe, Big Foot Dreams, as well as a special greeting from Oregon Montessori Association's Executive Director, Dalia Avello.

Throughout the days of the MSJ conference, there were a variety of wonderful additions! Once again, MSJ supported most meals, with the intention to highlight businesses of the Global Majority to cater on Saturday. There was a fun social event, accompanied with live music by Los Borikwas. There were 11 vendors present for the conference, selling a variety of goods, Montessori materials, and information to share about their organizations. There were two days of general sessions that were focused on panel discussions, which included school and community leaders of the Global Majority from Oregon. Ten panelists were welcomed to the stage to share their stories and experiences regarding decolonizing Montessori education and building better community partnerships between Montessori programs and community organizations.

At the closing general assembly, MSJ

acknowledged the outgoing founding MSJ board members Tiffany Jewell, Althea Miller, Amelia Allen, Daisy Han, and Trisha Moquino. The 2019-2021 Board of Directors welcomed D. Ann Williams and Tamika Cross.

Lastly, on behalf of the MSJ community we'd like to thank all of our sponsors, members and followers!

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*Tamika Cross is the External Communications Director and a Board member for Montessori for Social Justice. She is the founder and director of Cross Montessori Angels ([www.cross-montessoriangels.com](http://www.cross-montessoriangels.com)).*

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