

Responses are listed in alphabetical order by last name.

Responses to SCMA Questions from Dr. Gary Burgess

1. In recognition of the large number of public schools with Montessori programs, in 2007 a position was created at the SCDE for a Montessori coordinator to work with school districts. This lasted through around 2016. Among the initiatives accomplished during this time was a modification of SC teacher licensure laws, creation of training for administrators and a webpage of Montessori resources <https://personalizesc.ed.sc.gov/pd/montessori-programs/>. Would you be willing to reinstate this position?

I would like to sit down and discuss Montessori with a team of teachers who engage students in the pedagogy of the Montessori Method. Given the current atmosphere with public education being under attack, I know that the system of Montessori education is under attack as well.

2. A hallmark of Montessori education is multi-aged grouping, with three age or grade levels sharing a classroom. Early childhood Montessori was designed to accommodate 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds. Many schools are unable to utilize the model fully because they do not receive reimbursement for 3-year-olds, even though we know how powerful early learning experiences are. Are you willing to explore options for funding 3-year-olds in Montessori classrooms?

No response provided.

3. Please explain your position on school choice.

I believe that the first choice should be an outstanding local public school in every neighborhood. If those schools do not offer the programs that students need then school choice must not be an option but must be a guarantee and districts should be required to provide transportation for those students to the school that meets their academic needs (currently we do not have authentic school choice in South Carolina).

4. Teachers have become frustrated with the amount of teaching time being used for testing and test preparation. Do you have a plan to streamline or alleviate this frustration? If so, what is that plan?

Testing and supervision of students outside of the classroom is on my agenda. I plan to alleviate any standardized test that is not required by law and to push to change the law to alleviate testing that is not formative and instructive in nature. I plan to train volunteers to free teachers up of lunch supervision, restroom supervision and clerical tasks.

Responses to SCMA Questions from Ms. Lisa Ellis

1. In recognition of the large number of public schools with Montessori programs, in 2007 a position was created at the SCDE for a Montessori coordinator to work with school districts. This lasted through around 2016. Among the initiatives accomplished during this time was a modification of SC teacher licensure laws, creation of training for administrators and a webpage of Montessori resources <https://personalizesc.ed.sc.gov/pd/montessori-programs/>. Would you be willing to reinstate this position?

I am a fan of the Montessori program, and I think it has great benefits for children's growth, not just in academics, but also in soft skills. I don't feel comfortable speaking to whether or not I would reinstate the position as I would want to know more information on why it was cut, but I am not opposed to it. Ultimately, we need to offer a high-quality education to every student in South Carolina, and that does not equate to the same education for all.

2. A hallmark of Montessori education is multi-age grouping, with three age or grade levels sharing a classroom. Early childhood Montessori was designed to accommodate 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds. Many schools are unable to utilize the model fully because they do not receive reimbursement for 3-year-olds, even though we know how powerful early learning experiences are. Are you willing to explore options for funding 3-year-olds in Montessori classrooms?

Absolutely. Again, I would have to study the budget, but SC can make great strides by getting young children into strong educational settings.

3. Please explain your position on school choice.

If by school choice, you mean any type of system that takes public money and applies it to private institutions, I am against it. We are already working in a woefully underfunded school system, and schools cannot afford to lose any more money. If you are talking about school choice among public schools, then yes, I can support that. Fundamentally, I think all schools should offer what students need, but we are not currently in a system that supports that. If a student needs to move to another public school to get the education they need, we should support that.

4. Teachers have become frustrated with the amount of teaching time being used for testing and test preparation. Do you have a plan to streamline or alleviate this frustration? If so, what is that plan?

Absolutely. We should only be testing what is federally mandated, and we should also move away from one day high stakes testing that doesn't accurately assess student growth. Right now, the big culprit of over testing are the school districts themselves. In order to do this, we have to rework the school report card that leans heavily on high stakes testing. I plan to address this through the Dept of Ed mandates first and then move on to state law.

Responses to SCMA Questions from Ms. Kathy Maness

1. In recognition of the large number of public schools with Montessori programs, in 2007 a position was created at the SCDE for a Montessori coordinator to work with school districts. This lasted through around 2016. Among the initiatives accomplished during this time was a modification of SC teacher licensure laws, creation of training for administrators and a webpage of Montessori resources <https://personalizesc.ed.sc.gov/pd/montessori-programs/>. Would you be willing to reinstate this position?

I am willing to look into the position of Montessori Coordinator at the SDE. Without knowing all of the details of the position, I cannot give a definitive answer, but I am willing to look into it.

2. A hallmark of Montessori education is multi-age grouping, with three age or grade levels sharing a classroom. Early childhood Montessori was designed to accommodate 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds. Many schools are unable to utilize the model fully because they do not receive reimbursement for 3-year-olds, even though we know how powerful early learning experiences are. Are you willing to explore options for funding 3-year-olds in Montessori classrooms?

I am willing to look into options and seek funding for three-year-olds in our Montessori programs.

3. Please explain your position on school choice.

I support school choice. Montessori education is a great example of school choice in our state.

4. Teachers have become frustrated with the amount of teaching time being used for testing and test preparation. Do you have a plan to streamline or alleviate this frustration? If so, what is that plan?

In my position as Executive Director of Palmetto State Teachers Association, I hear from many teachers across South Carolina. A major frustration is TOO MUCH TESTING. I had a kindergarten teacher last night tell me she has to test her kindergarteners 28 times during the year. That is ridiculous. Three-, four- and five-year-olds should not have to think about being tested. Our young children should be developing natural interest, learning how to work with others and be part of a classroom community, and learn by play. This overuse of testing MUST STOP. In the first 6 months of office, I will have a task force that looks at all the testing our students in SC are forced to do. These findings will not sit on a shelf. I will work with the General Assembly to reduce testing especially in our early grades and use this office as a bully pulpit to reduce testing.