

SCHOOL

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On the playground, some 20 small children take turns pushing each other on the swings and pulling each other in wagons. When one child is hurt, the others rush around to help out, asking if the child is OK. There is almost no fighting, something Owens attributes to the Montessori approach and the parent involvement in the program.

"You have to be willing to be a partner in your child's education," Owen said. "We have open houses and art gallery nights. As parents, you will be involved and engaged. If you're here, it's intentional."

Teachers were trained in the Montessori methods and do not give traditional group lessons but rather implement the progress of each child through individual lessons and record keeping. The school's approach features an organized environment and allows children to stay busy with self-guided, uninterrupted work.

Scott said her 2-year-old daughter, Unique Harris, has been attending for about 11 months and the school is everything that she had hoped it might be.

"It's wonderful," Scott said. "She comes home and she knows new songs and how to count to 10 in Spanish. They teach all sorts of things that will help her later in life."

Community Cooperative Ministries has also partnered with community members to offer children who attend the school — and then graduate an area high school — a scholarship to Edison State College. Owen said officials are still looking for more sponsors for the program.



COURTESY PHOTO

Children play at the Montessori school on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

Community Cooperative Ministries is a consortium of The Soup Kitchen, Meals on Wheels, Hands & Hearts Child-care, and Faith In Action of Southwest Florida. The agencies combined to serve the holistic needs of the family across the generations by providing nutritious meals, groceries, transportation, affordable childcare and referral services to the homeless, seniors, working poor, children and the frail. ■

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