

A Montessori Leadership Guide

Rethinking Montessori Operations

2026



Insights from
Tim Seldin
President



A Note from Tim Seldin

Tim Seldin, President, Montessori Foundation and IMC Montessori schools are entering one of the most significant operational transitions in their modern history. For generations, many of us operated within relatively stable environments. Enrollment was dependable. Competition was modest. Communication expectations were simpler. Administrative systems could remain informal without creating serious organizational strain. That environment has changed, and it is not returning.



This guide exists because school leaders today face pressure from multiple directions at once, declining birth rates, intensifying competition, rising staffing costs, growing parent expectations, teacher fatigue, multi-campus complexity, and the demand for measurable leadership outcomes. At the same time, we are working to preserve something deeply human: environments built around concentration, relationships, observation, and authentic child development.

How do we modernize operationally without losing what makes Montessori worth modernizing in the first place?

I prepared this guide in collaboration with illumine, a developer of AI-powered software built for managing schools and childcare programs. We wrote it in response to our shared recognition of the operational challenges facing Montessori schools. illumine supports the Montessori Foundation's work with schools, and I have found their platform genuinely relevant to the problems we describe in these pages. I want to be transparent about that relationship, while confirming that the observations in this guide come from more than fifty years of working with Montessori schools, and the operational challenges I describe are ones I have found in schools of every size in many countries.

I believe that the answer to our current moment is not less technology, but better-organized technology, and a different way of thinking about the systems behind the school. This guide is my attempt to help you think it through.

By the end, you should leave with three things: a clear picture of where your school stands today, a vision for what a single connected platform would change across the five operational functions every Montessori school runs, and the shape of a system that could work for your own organization.

You do not need to act on everything immediately. You do need to know what you are building toward. The sooner you start, the more you and your team will feel the difference by the next school year.

Tim Seldin
President



How To Use This **Guide**

This is a working document, not a brochure. It is organized in five parts, each one building on the last.

01

Where We Stand

The real cost of disconnected tools: wasted hours, duplicate entry, and hidden debt that surfaces at the worst moment.

02

What Is Changing Around You

Forces converging: a different kind of parent, a harder enrollment market, and attention-economy expectations.

03

What to Build

One connected platform replacing fragmented tools, across parent experience, teacher sustainability, leadership visibility, and AI.

04

The Connected Journey

Five functions, enrollment, registration, billing, parent engagement, observations, and compliance, each shown fragmented vs. connected.

05

Proof and Reflection

How Guidepost Montessori made the move across 80+ preschools in 20+ states, with MMI International and others.

About illumine



A Note on the Partner Behind This Guide

Before we move into the substance of what Montessori operations need to look like in 2026, I want to introduce the organization that made this guide possible.

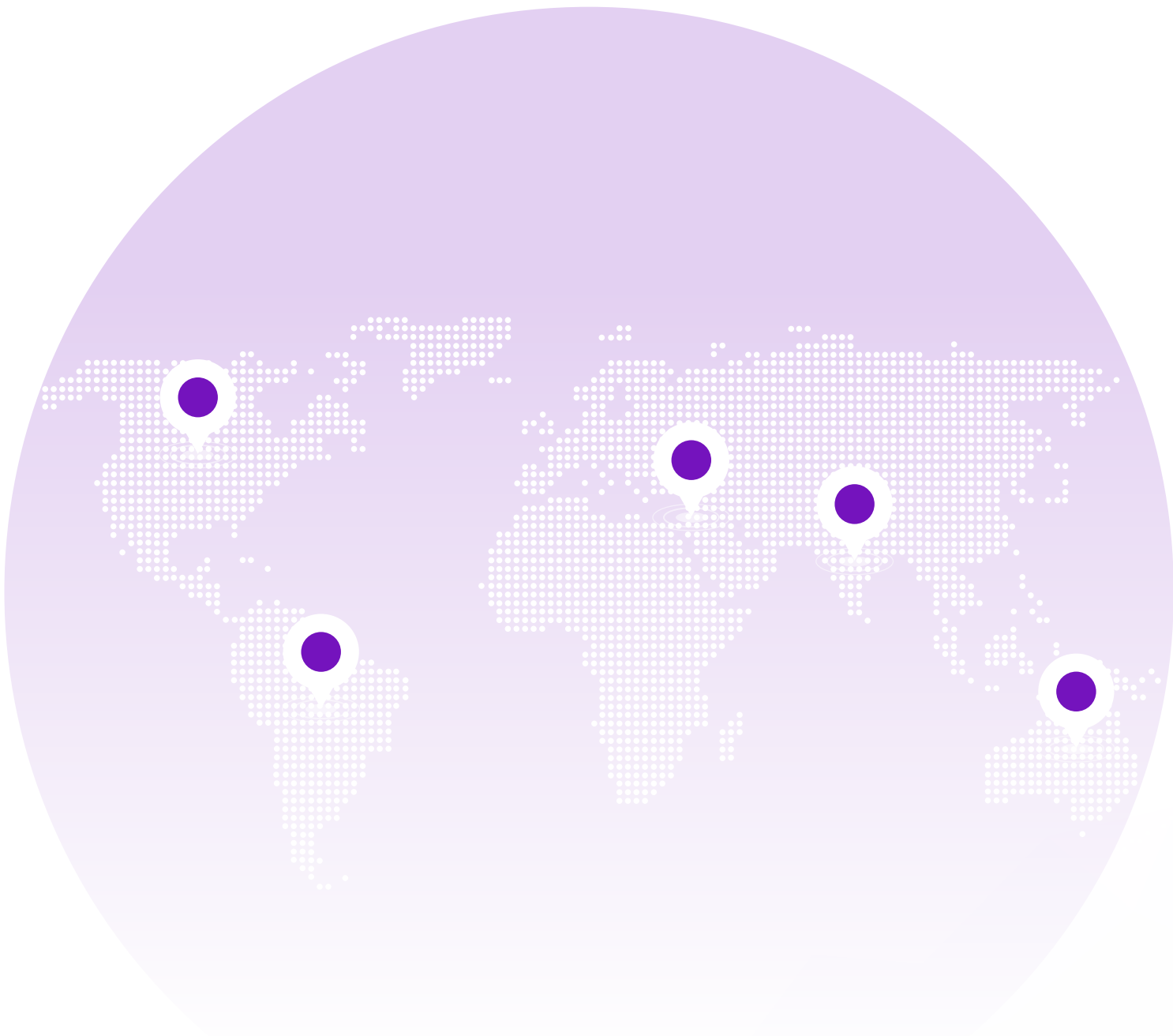
illumine was founded by three co-founders: Navneet Rastogi, who serves as CEO, Sourabh Agarwal, and Purva Goyal. They set out to build something that did not yet exist: a unified, AI-powered platform connecting the full operational life of a Montessori or early education school, from inquiry and enrollment to classrooms, billing, compliance, and family engagement.



illumine first grew across markets in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Australia, and Europe and India and then the US supporting more than 3,000 schools and childcare programs of all sizes, from single-campus nurseries to large multi-site networks operating across countries.

Every director, in every country, is trying to solve the same core problem, how to run a school well without losing the human heart of the work.

illumine's U.S. entry was significantly accelerated by its partnership with **Guidepost Montessori**, one of the largest and most respected Montessori networks in the world. Guidepost announced that it had selected illumine as its unified operational platform across more than eighty preschools in more than twenty U.S. states. The reasons Guidepost chose illumine are worth understanding, as they are the same reasons any serious Montessori leader should take a close look at.



3,000+

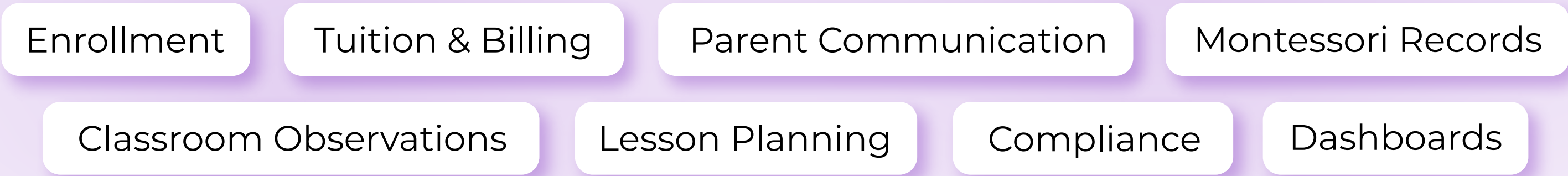
Schools & childcare programs supported worldwide

80+

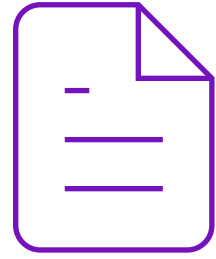
Guidepost preschools moving to illumine across 20+ U.S. states

What the Platform Actually Does

At its core, illumine replaces the patchwork of disconnected tools that most schools have accumulated over time with **one connected system**.

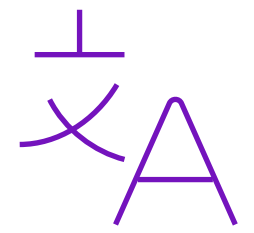


What distinguishes illumine from earlier generations of school management software is that **artificial intelligence is built into the operational workflows** rather than added as a feature.



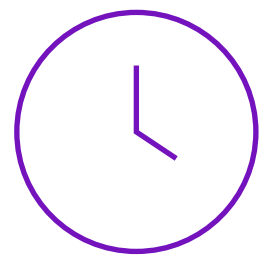
Daily Reports

AI drafts daily reports from observation notes, so guides refine rather than compose from scratch.



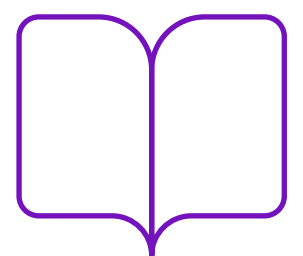
Multilingual Translation

Real-time translation of communications, so multilingual families receive the same quality of information.



After-Hours Inquiries

AI manages after-hours inquiry responses and tour scheduling, so no prospective family goes unanswered.



Lesson Planning

Planning support aligned specifically to Montessori materials, not generic early childhood curriculum.

This last point matters especially to Montessori leaders. illumine is not a generic childcare platform with a Montessori add-on. The platform includes specific support for Montessori curriculum frameworks, three-year-cycle record-keeping, mixed-age classroom management, and the individualized observation and documentation that lie at the heart of authentic Montessori practice. The AI tools are designed to support the guide's observation rather than replace it, to handle the administrative work surrounding it so that the observing itself gets more time and attention, not less.

The mission, as **CEO Navneet Rastogi** describes it, is to remove operational friction so that educators can focus on what matters most: supporting children and their development.

That mission is one I find genuinely aligned with what Montessori schools need.

Gartner Recognition and User Trust



illumine has been independently recognized as a top-rated childcare management platform by Gartner Digital Markets, across all three of Gartner's platforms Capterra, Software Advice, and GetApp. The consistent themes in those reviews are ease of use, the quality of parent communication it enables, and the responsiveness of the illumine team. **For a platform used in more than 3,000 schools across dozens of countries, that consistency of experience is itself significant.**

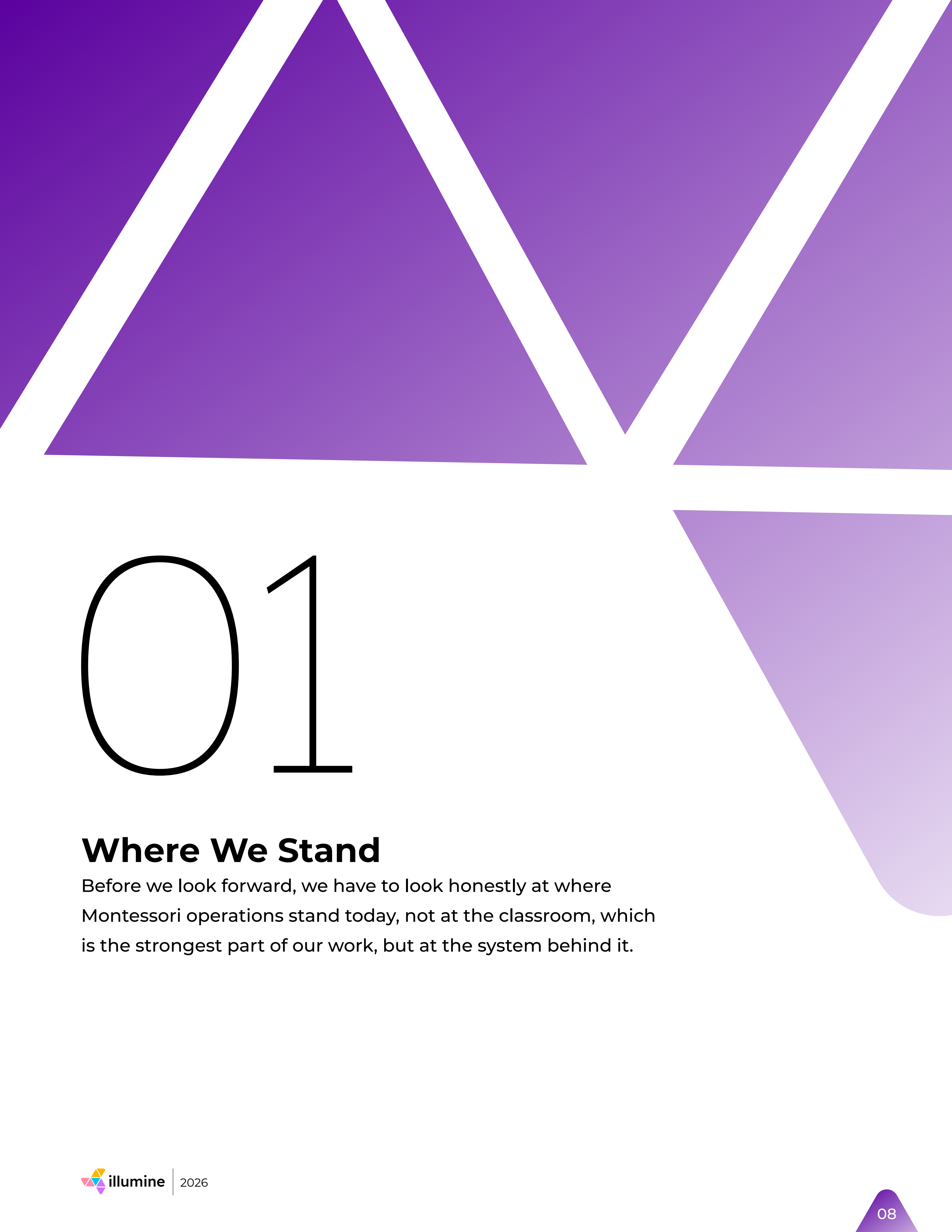
One of the things I most appreciate about what illumine has built is its genuine user-friendliness. Most school software is anything but. There is often a steep learning curve, and once staff have climbed it, they are understandably reluctant to change. But in schools, change happens constantly with new teachers, new office managers, new administrators. Every time a key staff member leaves, someone new has to learn the system. In my experience working with schools of every size, this learning curve is a real and underappreciated operational risk. illumine has taken ease of use seriously from the beginning.

Now Entering the U.S. School Market

illumine is now actively building its presence in the United States, with a particular focus on Montessori and early childhood education networks. If you want to learn more, explore the platform, or start a conversation about whether illumine might be a fit for your school or network, you can find everything you need at **illumine.app**. The team is genuinely interested in hearing from school leaders, and the conversation about what your school specifically needs is a good place to start.

Everything your Montessori deserves at

Go to illumine



01

Where We Stand

Before we look forward, we have to look honestly at where Montessori operations stand today, not at the classroom, which is the strongest part of our work, but at the system behind it.

The Decade Is Changing Under Our Feet

The world you stepped into as a Montessori leader in 2016 is gone. Parents communicated through email and the school newsletter. Inquiries came in by phone. Tuition was billed once a quarter. Enrollment moved at the pace of word of mouth. A handful of forms, a billing service, and a competent administrator could run most of the operations of most schools.

The gap between the two is not talent or intent, it is infrastructure. The schools that pull ahead will be the ones that stop patching and start building: **one connected system** where an inquiry, a family's decision, and a leader's forecast all live on the same thread. That work does not get easier by waiting. It only gets more expensive.

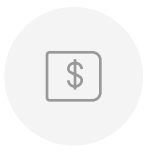
The School in 2016



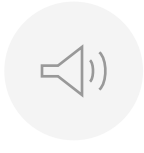
Email and the newsletter carried communication



Inquiries arrived by phone, during office hours



Tuition was billed once a quarter



Enrollment moved at the pace of word of mouth

The School Today



Mobile-first communication, immediate responses expected



Inquiries at all hours from families comparing schools



Tuition plans vary



Leadership asks for retention forecasts and cross-campus comparisons

The Fragmentation Tax

Most Montessori schools did not set out to build fragmented operations.

A Fragmented Approach



 **The cost isn't in the tools, it's in the seams between them.**
Every gap is manual reconciliation, duplicate entry, and delayed answers.

Behind many Montessori schools today, the operating environment looks something like this:



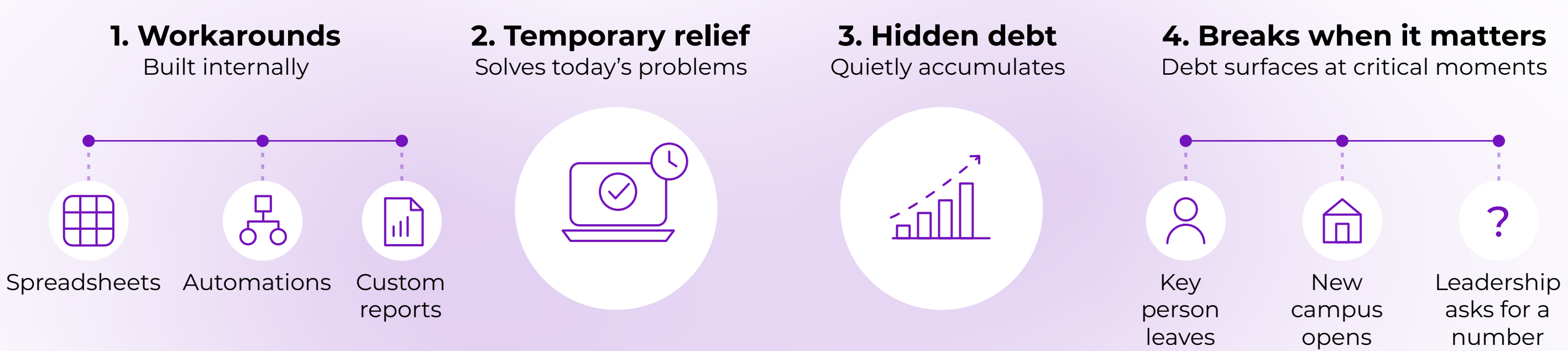
Each tool may solve a departmental need. Together, they create a fragmented way of running the school, one that works only because dedicated people hold it together.

Fragmented
tools cost
each guide

3-5 hrs

every week, hours that belong in the classroom

What I appreciate about illumine is that it addresses virtually every aspect of school operations in a single solution, and it is genuinely user-friendly. The human cost runs deeper than any data point, though. Administrators become the integration layer, reconciling information across systems that were never designed to speak to one another. Duplicate data entry creates errors. Delayed reporting means leadership is always looking at yesterday. A parent enrolled but was never invoiced. A child marked absent in one system, present in another. When something breaks across tools, no one fully owns the problem.



54%
of schools without a unified platform
run 10 to 15 officially sanctioned apps

42%
of parents rate their multi-app school
experience a 5 out of 10 or lower

Some schools respond by building internal workarounds, spreadsheets, automations, custom reports that temporarily solve the problem while quietly adding maintenance burden over time. **That operational debt does not announce itself. It accumulates until a key person leaves, a new campus opens, or leadership asks for a number that no one can produce in under an hour.**

I experienced this directly at the Montessori Foundation when we attempted to build our own custom app using an off-the-shelf platform. It never worked correctly. The cost of building something truly functional turned out to be astronomically beyond what a nonprofit educational organization could reasonably sustain. The lesson was not that Montessori organizations should avoid technology. It was that building and maintaining serious operational software is rarely a side project and that expecting informal systems to hold a growing school together is a strategy that eventually fails.

02

What Is Changing Around You

Three forces that are reshaping Montessori operations:

- 01 A new kind of parent.
- 02 A harder enrollment market.
- 03 Higher expectations for responsiveness.

01. A New Kind of Parent

Twenty years ago, many Montessori families arrived already philosophically prepared. They had read Dr. Montessori's books, visited classrooms, or been introduced to the method. Schools served close-knit communities, and expectations around communication, documentation, and responsiveness were dramatically simpler.

That world has largely passed.

Today's families arrive shaped by intense competition, rising anxiety about their children's futures, demographic shifts, economic pressure, and digital communication expectations. **Parents now expect immediate responses, transparent communication, regular updates, easy access to information, and ongoing reassurance throughout every stage of their relationship with a school.**

And Montessori remains deeply misunderstood by many of the families. Parents may love the warmth of a Montessori classroom while feeling genuinely uncertain about mixed-age groupings, the absence of grades, long work periods, or why adults are not constantly directing children. Even families deeply attracted to Montessori carry hidden anxiety beneath their enthusiasm. Will my child be prepared academically? What happens in middle school?

This means the parent journey is no longer separate from school operations. It has become central to enrollment, retention, community stability, financial sustainability, and the long-term health of Montessori schools. Schools that thrive in the coming decade will not simply be schools with excellent classrooms. They will be schools that intentionally design systems helping families understand, trust, and remain deeply connected to the Montessori journey.

02. A Harder Enrollment Market

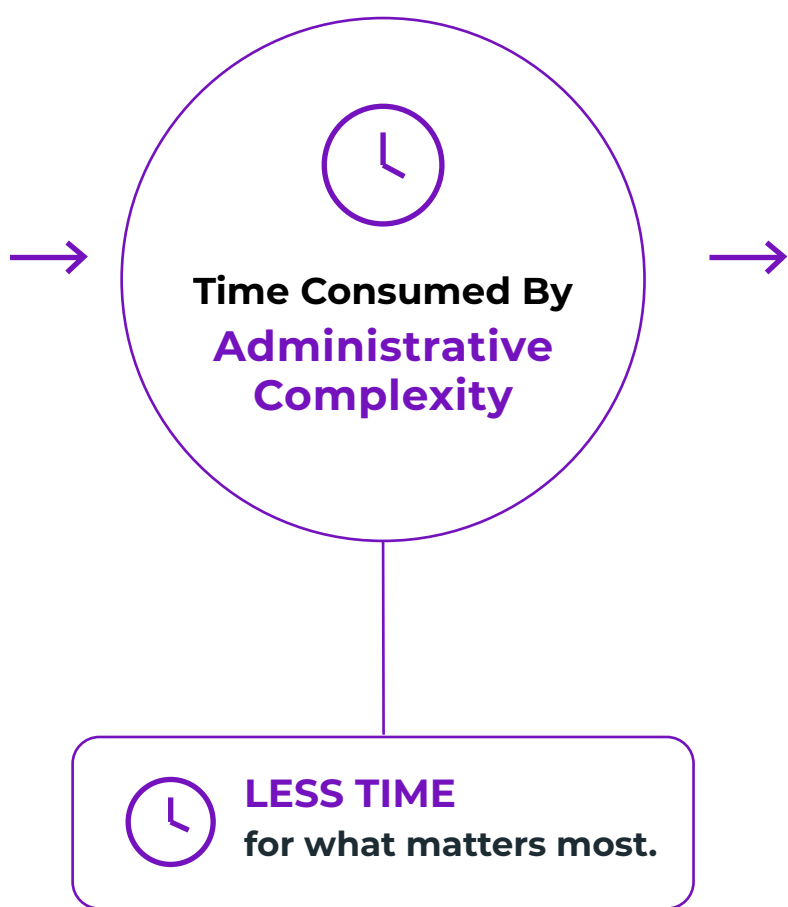
Birth rates are declining across much of the United States and internationally, meaning that over time, there will simply be fewer school-age children to enroll. At the same time, publicly funded early childhood options are expanding in a growing number of states and communities in ways that can compete directly with independent Montessori schools particularly when families weigh private tuition against free or heavily subsidized options for four-year-olds and, in some markets, three-year-olds.

Early childhood programs have traditionally provided the enrollment foundation that supports long-term Montessori sustainability. When schools lose four and five year olds to free public programs as public childcare expands, the financial model becomes far more difficult to sustain. Younger children require smaller adult-child ratios, more staffing, more specialized environments, and more intensive parent communication.

Today, schools must manage enrollment, retention, communication, and operations more intentionally. Every family retained is worth far more than the tuition it represents.

What Consumes Their Time

-  Juggling between tools
-  Communicating with parents
-  Reports written from scratch
-  Repetitive admin work
-  Language barriers



What Drives Retention

-  Observe children deeply
-  Prepare individualized lessons
-  Maintain classroom environments
-  Document student growth
-  Build relationships & support children

03. The Attention Economy Has Changed Expectations

Families today are accustomed to instant replies, real-time notifications, personalized communication, frictionless scheduling, and mobile-first experiences.

When one school responds to an inquiry within minutes while another takes days, parents often see the faster response as a sign of better organization, attentiveness, and professionalism.

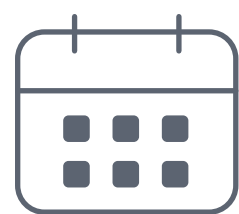
This does not mean Montessori schools should become transactional or automated in ways that strip the warmth from human relationships. **It means communication delays, inconsistent follow-up, and fragmented parent experiences now carry far higher operational risk.** Schools that build thoughtful, responsive, communication systems are consistently better positioned to convert inquiries into enrollments.

The responsiveness standard applies internally as well.

Teachers who must navigate four apps to complete a daily report costs them time and attention. Administrators without real-time data make decisions on impressions, not information. Leaders who spot problems only in crisis have outgrown their systems.

Three forces, modern parents, a harder enrollment market, and faster responsiveness expectations are pressing on the same point: the system behind the school.

Responds In Days

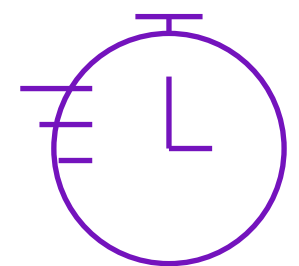


2–3 days
to first reply

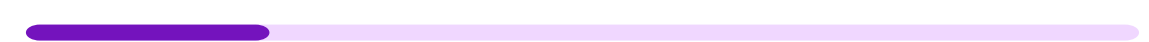


Attention has moved on.
Family enrolls elsewhere.

Responds In Minutes



Within 1 min
to first reply



Family feels seen.
Tour booked the same day.

03

What to Build

If the classroom is prepared for the child, the system must be prepared for the school. This part describes what that means across five dimensions:

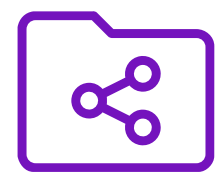
- 01 The platform itself
- 02 The parent journey
- 03 Teacher sustainability
- 04 Leadership visibility
- 05 The role of AI

01. From Many Tools to One Platform

Leading Montessori networks are rethinking how work gets done across the organization. It is taking shape through three key operational shifts.



First, from parent communication to parent experience: rather than communication, billing, forms, and classroom updates each living in a separate app, one connected journey runs from inquiry through enrollment to ongoing family engagement, fewer touchpoints, more consistent communication, stronger trust.



Second, from siloed teams to one shared view: rather than admissions, finance, and the classroom each owning a separate slice while administrators stitch everything together, every team works from the same place, handoffs become visible and measurable, and accountability is clear when something goes wrong.



Third, from local fixes to network-wide ways of working: rather than each campus building its own process and reporting depending on manual local exports, one dashboard covers every campus, performance becomes comparable across locations, and problems become visible early enough to address.

The decision to move from departmental tools to a connected platform is a leadership decision about how the organization will run.

What does this look like in practice?

illumine replaces the patchwork by bringing parent communication, tuition and billing, enrollment and admissions, attendance, compliance reporting, learning records, and leadership dashboards into one place. AI is built into the workflows where it genuinely reduces adult workload. Schools, guides, families, and leadership see one organization rather than five departments running separate systems.

02. The Parent Journey, Redesigned

Many schools still think about admissions primarily as a transactional sequence: inquiry, tour, application, enrollment. But Montessori schools increasingly discover that enrollment is not the end of the admissions process. In many ways, it is the beginning. Parents rarely make a clear decision to reject a school. More often, they hesitate, lose confidence, and quietly drift away. The same happens after enrollment, as normal developmental challenges can turn early excitement into uncertainty. **Without intentional systems for communication, orientation, and relationship-building, schools often lose families not because Montessori failed, but because uncertainty went unmanaged.**

In Montessori education, we speak often about the prepared environment. We understand that children flourish when the environment has been thoughtfully designed to meet their developmental needs. The same principle applies to families. New family onboarding should be understood as a prepared environment for parents designed with the same intentionality, developmental awareness, and respect for the conditions under which trust and understanding grow.

The New Parent Onboarding Playbook, developed through the Montessori Family Alliance, organizes the first ninety days into three phases: Welcome and Prepare, Settle and Understand, and Deepen and Partner. Each phase carries a carefully sequenced rhythm of communication and education, beginning with warm reassurance immediately after enrollment and continuing through guidance on how Montessori classrooms function, how to prepare children emotionally for the transition, how to support independence at home, and how to interpret the language and rhythms of Montessori school life.

Rather than presenting families with a single flood of information at enrollment, effective onboarding delivers a steady, gradually unfolding rhythm of support. Information offered at the right moment when parents are actually experiencing the question it addresses lands very differently than information offered weeks in advance of any felt need.

Parent Education as a Core Operational Strategy

For years, parent education was treated as an enrichment activity. Schools that fail to educate parents consistently experience higher attrition, increased family anxiety, weaker retention, and pressure to compromise Montessori practices. Schools that create consistent systems of parent education experience stronger trust, higher retention, referrals and healthier long-term enrollment stability.



Regular school-wide community gatherings are among the most effective vehicles for this ongoing education. Monthly gatherings can help new families hear the shared language of the school community, develop relationships with veteran parents, and feel that their questions matter. Parent Ambassador programs in which experienced parent volunteers personally reach out to new families offer something that newsletters and email sequences cannot.

IN PRACTICE

When inquiries, tours, applications, sibling tracking, follow-up, enrollment, a family's first weeks, and the ongoing parent education sequence all live in the same operational system, the parent journey stops being a series of disconnected handoffs. It becomes a single relationship that the school can see and actively support. Lead conversion becomes a leadership metric.

Schools that have made this shift report stronger conversion, fewer families lost during the vulnerable first ninety days, and significantly higher retention into Elementary.

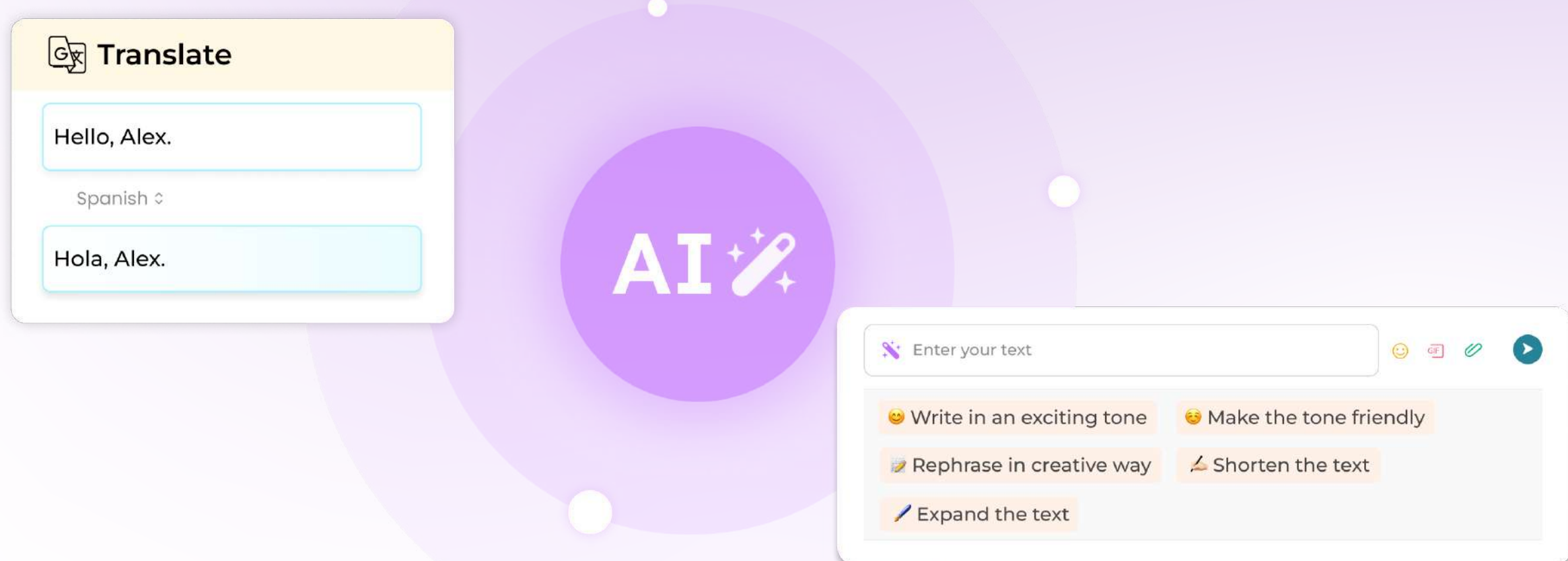
03. The Prepared Environment for Guides

Today's guides are often asked to simultaneously observe children deeply, prepare individualized lessons, maintain classroom environments, document student growth, complete compliance reporting, communicate constantly with parents, support behavioral and emotional challenges, and contribute to admissions and community-building efforts. Yet an increasing amount of their time is consumed by administrative complexity unrelated to the work they came to do.

The goal of strong operational systems is not efficiency in itself. It is sustainability.

IN PRACTICE

When observation notes, **daily reports, parent communication, lesson planning, and attendance are all in one connected system, the guide stops being the integration layer among three apps.** AI drafts the daily report from the morning's observation notes, so the guide refines rather than composes from scratch. Translation happens automatically, so multilingual families receive the same warmth and consistency as everyone else. Lesson planning support is aligned to Montessori materials. The result is not simply administrative convenience; it is hours returned to the classroom each week, deeper and more consistent observations, and guides who feel supported rather than buried.



04. What Leadership Can Finally See

One of the greatest challenges in multi-campus organizations is simply that information becomes trapped in separate systems.



Leadership can't see across the silos.

Problems surface only after they've already become serious.

Multi-site leadership increasingly requires systems that create visibility without creating bureaucracy. What leadership cannot see cannot be improved. Without operational visibility, leadership typically discovers problems only after they have become crises. By that point, the cost of correction in trust, in retention, in faculty stability is far higher than it needed to be. In many multi-campus organizations, different campuses describe the same processes differently. One campus defines an inquiry one way; another defines it differently. Admissions stages vary. Reporting practices drift apart.

Healthy organizations create common definitions and those definitions, enforced through shared systems, helps leadership focus more on strategic decision-making.

IN PRACTICE

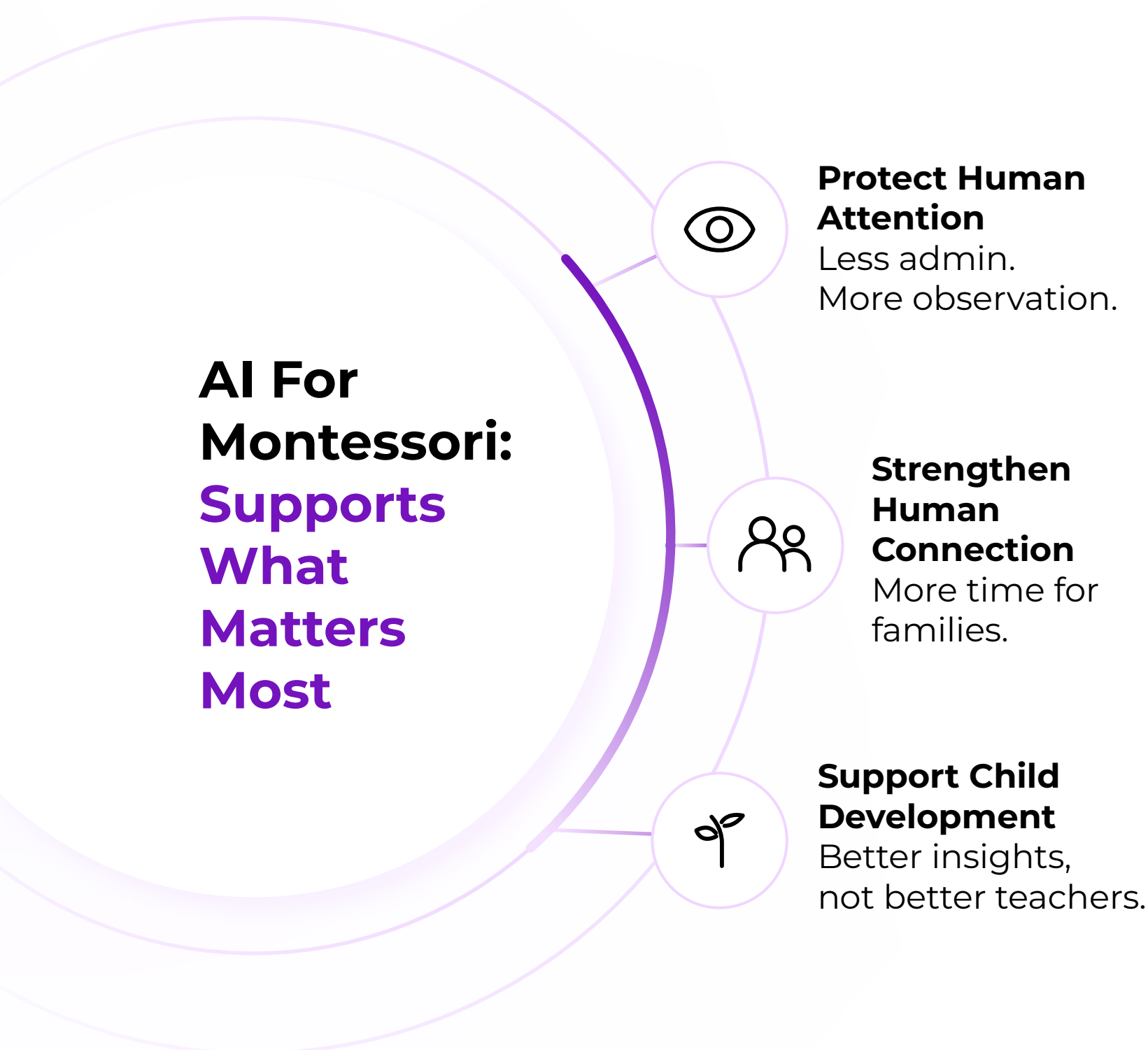
A connected platform makes enrollment, billing, staffing, attendance, and compliance visible at every level of the organization. School leaders can check classroom ratios in real time. Regional directors can monitor billing and enrollment trends across campuses. Executive directors can review network-wide performance in real time. Central leadership gains the visibility it has historically lacked. The network feels like a single, coherent organization for families and guides without erasing what makes each campus its own community.

05. AI Where It Matters

Artificial intelligence is now entering nearly every sector of education, and many Montessori leaders feel both curiosity and apprehension. Both responses are appropriate.

Montessori education is fundamentally rooted in observation, human development, relationships, and respect for individuality. AI should never replace those elements. It should not replace teacher judgment, standardize children's learning, or substitute for the human act of seeing a child clearly.

The key principle for Montessori applications of AI is this: it should protect human attention, not replace it. **If AI allows guides to spend less time buried in repetitive administrative work and more time observing children, mentoring families, and supporting development, then technology is serving Montessori rather than working against it. The question to ask of any AI application is not whether it is sophisticated, but whether it restores time and clarity to the people who most need both.**



The Key Principle



**AI should
protect human attention.
Not replace it.**

For educators - This means AI taking on the documentation that quietly consumes a teacher's day drafting daily reports from observation notes, pulling summaries, supporting lesson planning aligned to Montessori materials, and communicating with families in their own language. Observation remains the guide's work. AI gathers supporting context, not the other way around.

For parent experience - AI supports structured daily summaries, a consistent tone across classrooms, and translation to ensure no family is left out because of language. Guides carry no extra load. Parents feel more informed and connected.

For admissions and enrollment - AI can answer calls on your behalf and handle missed and after-hours contacts, qualify leads, schedule tours, and send follow-up reminders so that no opportunity slips through the cracks. The human admissions team still shapes the voice and the relationship. AI handles triage and timing.

For leadership and operations - AI can bring enrollment, billing, staffing, attendance, and compliance into a single view with early warnings and live dashboards across the network, so leadership can lead from clear signals rather than from assembled spreadsheets that are already days old.

“

“Investors want to know what your AI strategy is and how it will create value. For us, AI is about removing administrative friction and improving execution across the organization. It gives leaders better visibility into data, automates back-office processes, simplifies compliance, and ultimately creates better experiences for teachers and families. In areas like marketing, AI hasn't changed the fundamentals of how we drive growth it has changed the speed and sophistication with which we can execute, test, optimize, and make decisions.”

”



Steve Xu
Founder & Global CEO



guidepost
montessori

04

The Connected Journey

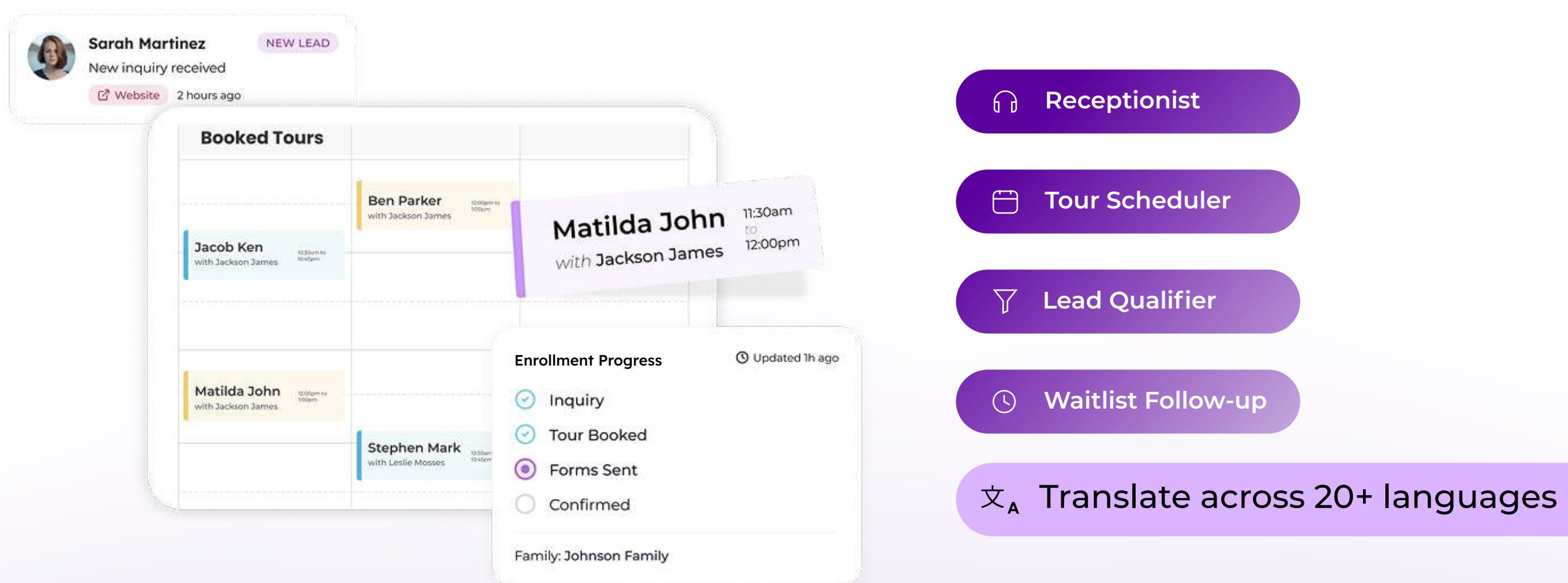
Every Montessori school runs across five connected functions.
See how a unified platform changes the way your school operates.

- 01 The Enrollment Journey
- 02 Registration, Billing and Center Management
- 03 Parent Engagement and Communication
- 04 Observations, Planning and Records
- 05 Compliance, Reporting and Visibility

01. The Enrollment Journey

The enrollment journey runs from first inquiry through tour, application, waitlist, offer, and acceptance and continues through re-enrollment and sibling pipelines over time.

In fragmented operations, inquiries sit unanswered, tours are scheduled in one tool, applications in another, and waitlists in spreadsheets. With lead-to-enrollment data scattered across disconnected systems, making it impossible to understand what is driving enrollments or where families are being lost.



IN PRACTICE

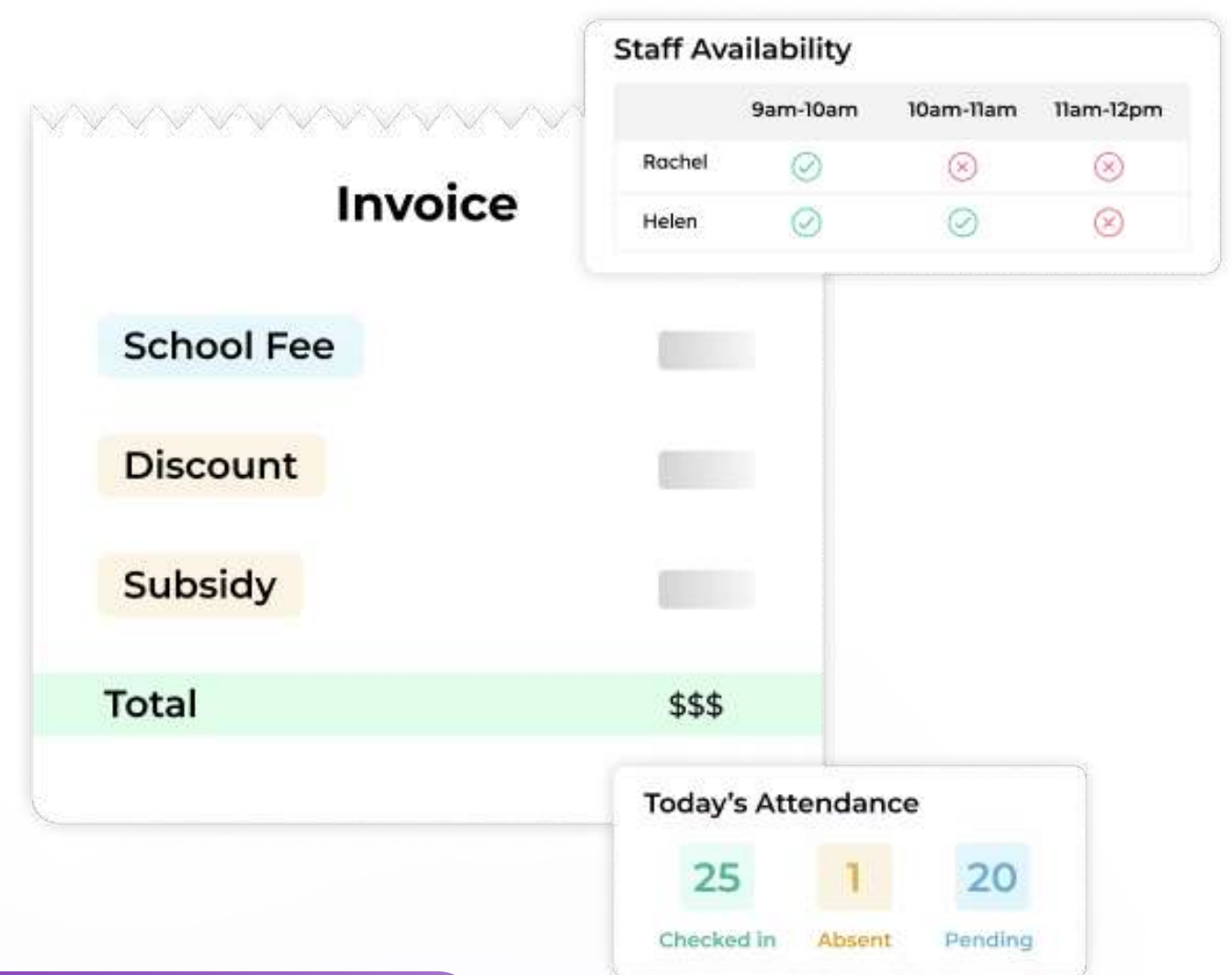
With a connected enrollment system, inquiries, tour scheduling, application management, waitlist tracking, and sibling re-enrollment all operate from the same record. AI helps improve conversion rates, and a unified system gives teams real-time visibility into response times and pipeline health across every center.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

- How fast does your team respond to inquiries, and how do you know?
- What share of inquiries become tours? Tours become enrollments?
- How is your waitlist being managed, and who has real-time visibility ?
- How many sibling re-enrollments are confirmed, not assumed?

02. Registration, Billing, and Center Management

Once a seat is accepted, schools shift from winning families to serving them. Registration, billing, and center management become the operational foundation of the family experience and the source of a disproportionate share of administrative burden in schools.



Multi-site operators grow network occupancy 30% faster with illumine.

[Learn More](#)

IN PRACTICE

With a connected system, the enrollment record a family completes becomes the billing, communication, and compliance records without re-entry. When a billing adjustment is made, it is reflected immediately across the organization. Capacity across classrooms and campuses is visible in real time, so leadership can make informed decisions about waitlists, staffing, and program planning.

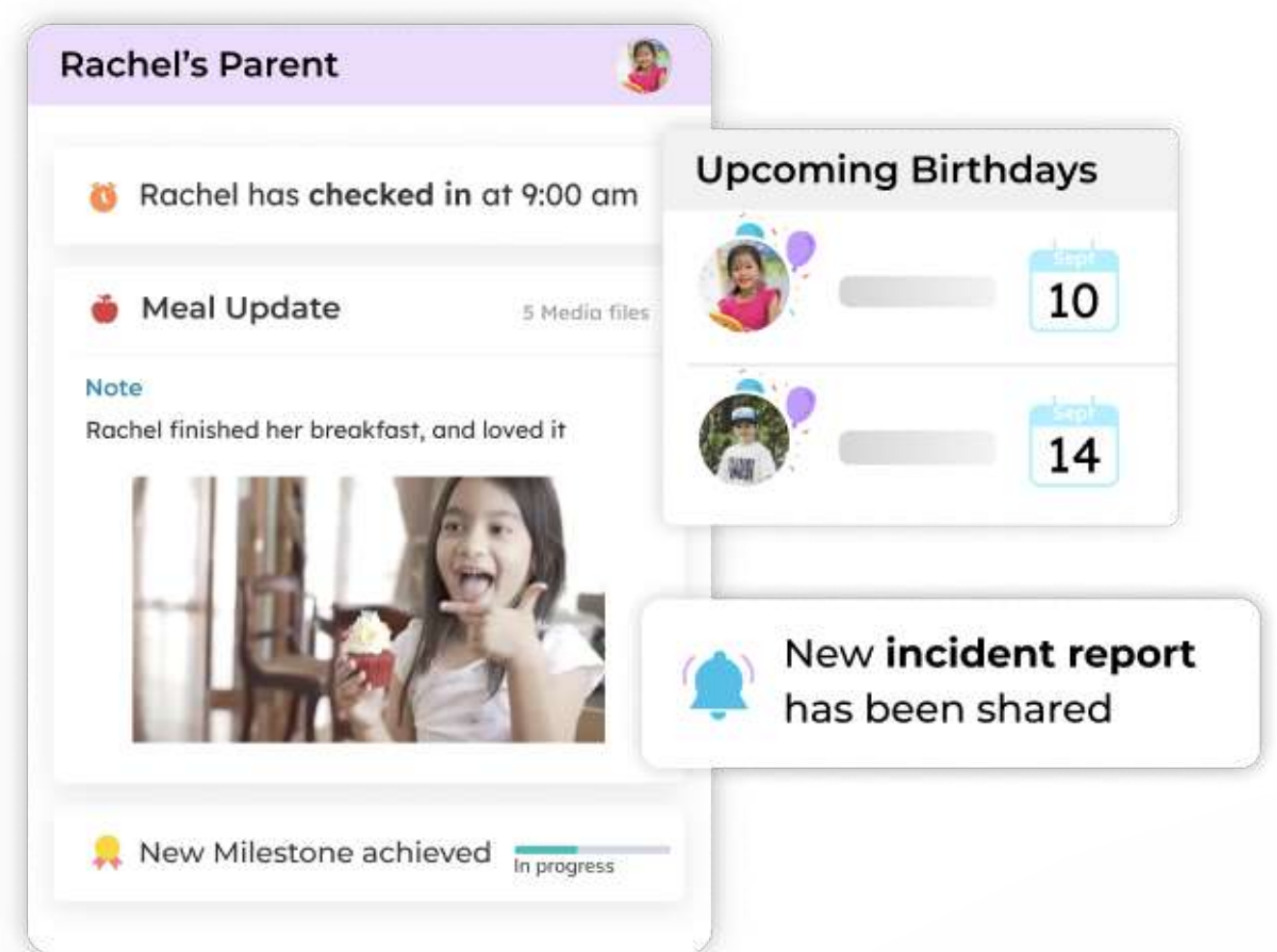
QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

- How many hours a week do you lose to data reconciliation?
- How often do billing discrepancies happen, and how long to fix?
- Can you see capacity across every center in real time?
- When a family switches campuses, how many systems update separately?

03. Parent Engagement and Communication

Parent engagement runs from day one: daily updates, photos, weekly notes, teacher-parent messaging, announcements, permission slips, RSVPs, and conferences.

In a fragmented school, it's scattered across tools, updates in one app, newsletters in another, conferences in a third, photos and permissions somewhere else. Each works alone, but together they create a disconnected experience for families and leave guides to keep everything in sync. When parent engagement runs through a single connected channel, families experience consistency rather than confusion.



IN PRACTICE

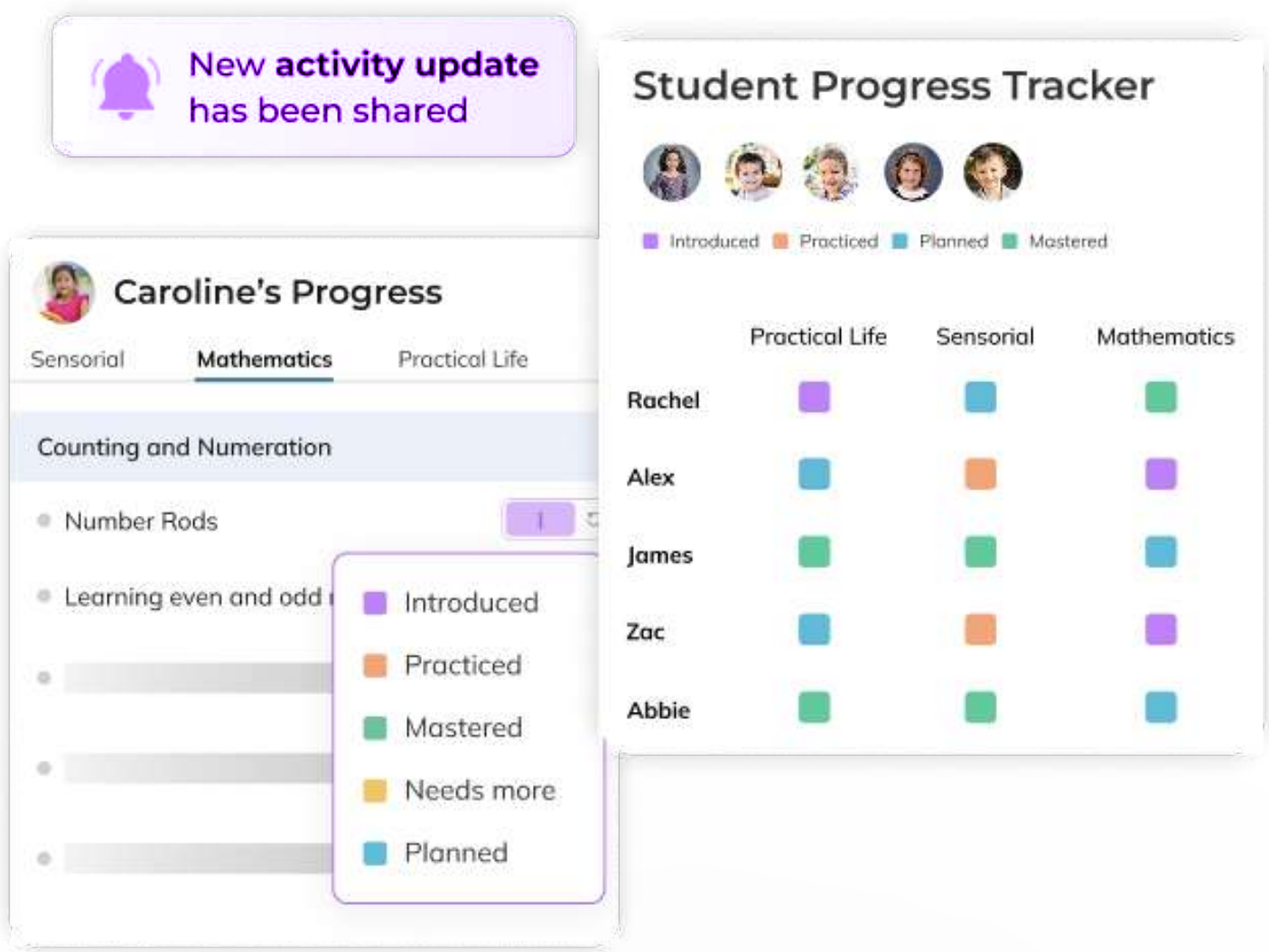
With a connected parent engagement system, daily reports, weekly notes, direct messages, photos, RSVPs, and announcements all flow through the same channel that families already check. Guides write once families receive consistently. AI handles translation automatically with no extra work from the teacher. Leadership can see, at a glance, which families are opening communications, which classrooms are communicating most consistently, and where engagement is weakening before it becomes a retention problem.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

- How many apps do parents need to stay informed?
- Is communication consistent across classrooms and centers?
- Do multilingual families receive the same communication experience?
- Can leadership see family engagement in one view?

04. Observations, Lesson Planning, and Records

Observation, individualized lesson planning, and long-term record-keeping are at the heart of Montessori practice. In fragmented operations, these activities are spread across notebooks, spreadsheets, and disconnected tools, forcing guides to hold the system together themselves.



When observations, lesson planning, family communication, and record-keeping are integrated into a single workflow, guides spend less time documenting and more time observing. And the organization maintains a more complete picture of each child's development.

IN PRACTICE

With a connected classroom records system, a single observation can flow seamlessly into daily reports, lesson plans, and long-term student records without guides re-entering information in multiple places. AI can draft daily summaries from observation notes, suggest lessons aligned to Montessori scope, and ensure records follow each child across the three-year cycle, giving every guide a complete picture of the child's journey.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

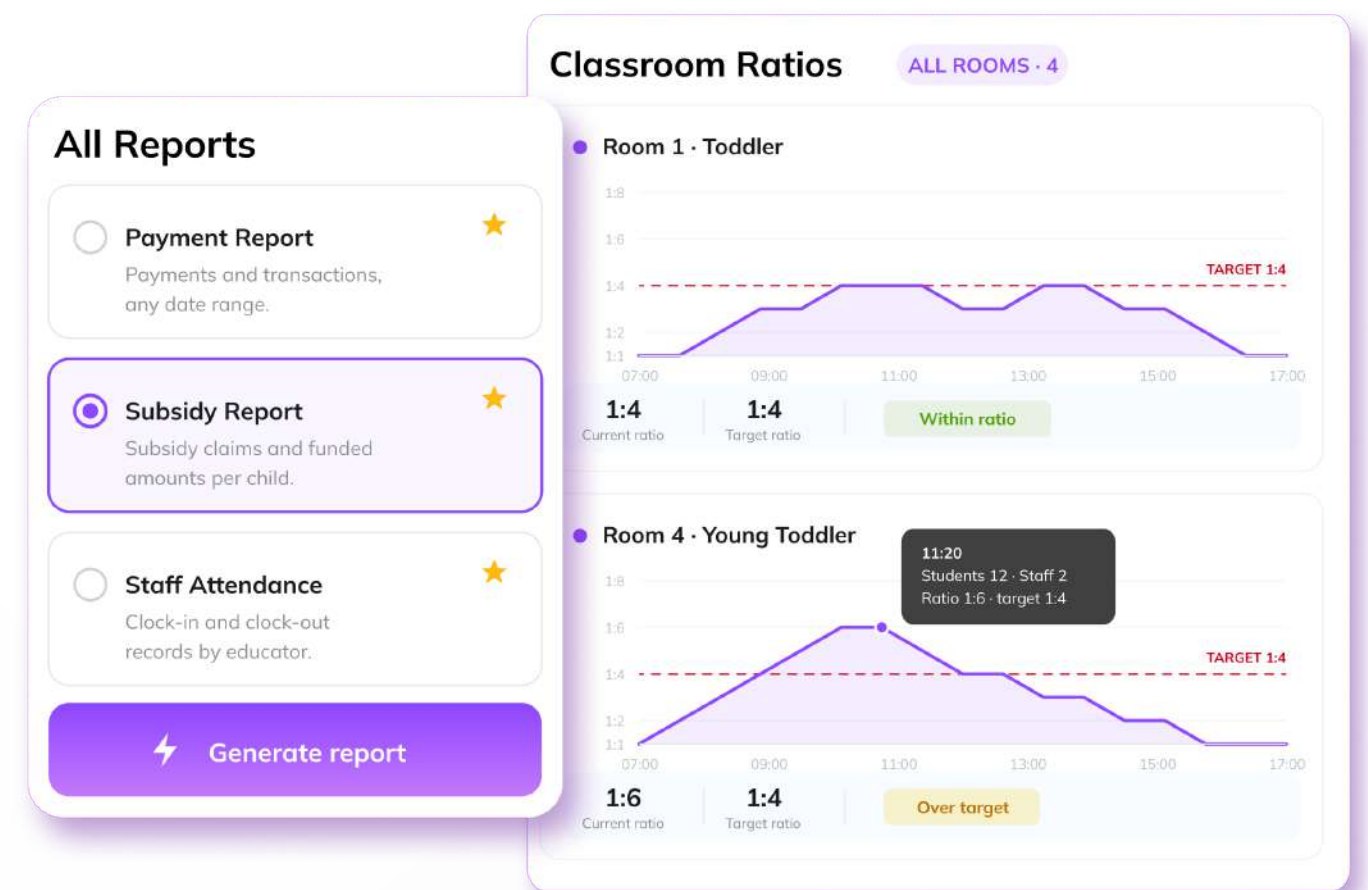
- How much time do guides spend documenting across systems?
- Is observation depth being supported by the system?
- Do child records follow the 3 year cycle, or reset each year?
- Where should AI save time, and where should humans stay in charge?

05. Compliance, Reporting, and Visibility Across Centers

All four operational layers: **enrollment, registration, parent engagement, and classroom practice** generate information.

The fragmented reality is: enrollment data in a spreadsheet, tuition collection in one system, attendance in another, compliance in another. Cross-campus comparisons are assembled manually. Reporting is retrospective. Compliance preparation becomes a recurring fire drill. By the time leadership sees the data, the moment to act on it has often passed.

When enrollment, billing, attendance, staffing, and compliance data are visible in one place in real time, the nature of leadership changes.



IN PRACTICE

With a connected compliance and reporting layer, enrollment, billing, attendance, staffing, and compliance documentation are all visible in real time at every level of the organization. Leaders review daily operational health in one view. Regional directors compare campus performance without waiting for manual reports. Executive directors and boards receive accurate real time information. When a licensing inspection requires documentation, it is available immediately.

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

- Can you see every center's key operations in one unified view?
- How quickly can you produce a board-ready operational report?
- Where does compliance documentation create organizational risk?
- What decisions would change if you had real-time visibility?

The Leadership Conversation

Six questions a director can take into the next board or leadership meeting.

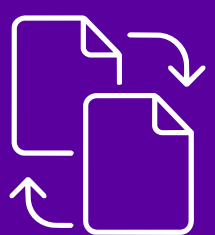


Count your systems.

How many platforms touch the family journey?

How many tools does your team use daily?

Can you view the entire family experience in one place?



Map duplicate entry.

Where is data entered more than once?

Which workflows rely on exports or copy-paste?

What happens when your people stop connecting your systems?



Audit the parent experience.

How many apps do parents need to use?

Is the experience consistent across every center?

Does the parent experience reflect the classroom experience?

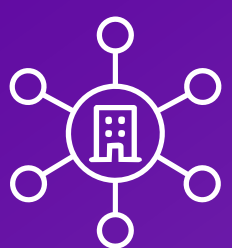


Review support complexity.

How many vendors support your operations?

Who owns cross-system issues?

When problems span systems, who is accountable?

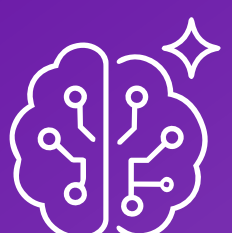


Test network scalability.

Can you see all key metrics in one view?

Can you compare performance across centers?

Can you double in size without doubling headcount?



Define where AI belongs.

Which workflows can be simplified without losing human judgment?

Where can admissions move faster without losing the human touch?

Is AI reducing workload or creating more of it?

Inside a Network Already Doing It

Guidepost Montessori, operating more than 80+ preschools across 20+ U.S. states, offers a concrete example of what this transition looks like at scale and what it reveals about the nature of the challenge.



When we decided to move to illumine for our U.S. network, the objective was to eliminate fragmented systems and create a unified experience for both our internal teams and the families we serve. Previously, many processes relied on manual work across disconnected tools from updating data between systems to calculating seat availability through spreadsheets and custom solutions. It worked, but only because people were holding it together. As we sought a more efficient operating model, that approach became unsustainable. We needed real-time visibility into what was happening across every campus, dramatically less administrative burden on our teams, and a system that could handle the complexity of operating dozens of schools across more than twenty states. illumine addressed all three.



Matthew Sears
SVP Technology



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montessori

Other networks making this transition include **MMI International Group**, with more than 150 centers across Europe and Southeast Asia, and **Illuminate Montessori**, with more than 15 centers across the United States.

The pattern across these organizations is consistent: leaders are moving away from fragmented departmental tools and toward one place where parent experience, day-to-day operations, classroom records, and leadership visibility all live together.

Final Reflection

For a modern Montessori network, the system behind the school shapes the experience of everyone in it: whether parents receive timely communication, whether guides observe children, whether leadership sees what is actually happening across locations.

The schools that thrive in the coming decade will pair strong Montessori practice with operational excellence, parent communication, teacher sustainability, and scalable systems.

Maria Montessori reminded us that education is not simply about what adults do to children. It is about creating conditions in which development can unfold naturally. The same principle applies to organizations. Leadership is not simply about managing people. **It is about creating conditions in which teachers can teach, families can trust, administrators can lead, and children can thrive.**

The prepared system is not about software, dashboards, or workflows. It is about creating organizational conditions that allow human potential to flourish. That goal is as Montessori today as it was more than a century ago.

A NEXT STEP

If the questions in this guide surfaced challenges you recognize in your own school or network, illumine offers an operational walkthrough for Montessori schools and organizations. It is a structured conversation about your current tools, the gaps in your parent experience, where duplicate work is consuming your team's time, and where a connected platform would make the most meaningful difference for your specific situation.

You can begin that conversation at

illumine.app. →

