illumine

MONTESSORI LEADERSHIP SERIES
2027 BENCHMARK

The Montessori Leadership Benchmark: Priorities for 2027

Drawing on conversations with 244 Montessori schools, this benchmark reveals the hidden costs of disconnected systems, challenges in key school functions, and leadership priorities for 2027.

- Admissions
- Montessori records
- Family communication
- Tuition
- Student observation



244 schools | 28 US states | Firsthand leadership insights

WRITTEN FOR

Heads of school, academic heads, guides and multi-campus leadership teams.

PUBLISHED BY

illumine

illumine: Built for Montessori school operations

illumine is an AI-native platform built for Montessori schools, shaped by Montessori expertise, and enhanced with AI to reduce administrative work without getting in the way of the Montessori approach.

Developed with insights from Montessori educators, school leaders, and experts, illumine combines Montessori-specific record keeping with the systems needed to manage a modern school.

We build technology that takes administrative work off school teams, brings families closer to the school, and helps Montessori leaders make better decisions while keeping Montessori principles at the heart of education.

500+
Montessori schools trust illumine globally

4,000+
centers across 70+ countries

SOC 2
certified

AMI & AMS
aligned

ONE CONNECTED PLATFORM

- Parent Communication
- Enrollments
- Montessori Records
- Billing
- Student Documents

TRUSTED BY LEADING SCHOOL GROUPS

Illuminate · guidepost · Canadian Montessori Pre School · Merton Montessori · MMI Modern Montessori International (London) · Natures Way Montessori

"illumine understands what Montessori educators truly need: a tool that respects the method while modernizing the operations.

Tim Seldin President, Montessori Foundation



The report at a glance

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About this report and the research behind it

244

Montessori schools
In conversation with illumine.

Montessori schools carefully prepare the learning environment for children. This report examines whether the systems supporting their guides, administrators, and leadership teams receive the same attention.

The findings bring together original research, firsthand school experiences, and perspectives from Montessori leaders to examine the operational challenges facing schools as they prepare for 2027.

SOURCE	WHAT IT COVERS
Built from Montessori voices	illumine spoke with **244 Montessori schools** to understand the challenges they face in managing day-to-day operations, including admissions, tuition, record keeping, and family communication.
In conversation with illumine	Technology adoption, key operational challenges across school functions, the capabilities schools value most, and factors shaping their technology purchasing decisions.

HOW TO READ THE FIGURES

The research is observational: it comes from prospective schools and existing customers in conversation with illumine. Schools are counted once per theme, and every figure names the group it is calculated from. Schools could select multiple responses, so totals may exceed 100%.

Voices in this report

Tim Seldin
President, The Montessori Foundation: expert perspective

Matthew Sears
SVP Technology, Guidepost Montessori: a network leader's view

Key findings shaping Montessori school operations in 2027

For Montessori leadership teams, the cost of multiple systems extends beyond software spending. Disconnected information creates inefficiencies, limits visibility across campuses, and complicates academic and administrative coordination. Without a unified view, leaders struggle to identify revenue risks, forecast enrollment, and anticipate challenges. These gaps ultimately affect financial sustainability, leadership capacity, and the ability to maintain consistent standards as schools grow.

The findings below are based on conversations between illumine and 244 Montessori schools. All statistics reflect insights gathered from these conversations, offering a clearer picture of the current state of Montessori school operations, the challenges schools face, and the priorities shaping their decisions for 2027.

63%

Daily operations often span multiple systems.

63% of schools use multiple tools, increasing administrative work and limiting leadership visibility.

33%

Tuition and billing remain a challenge.

33% of schools reported difficulties managing tuition plans, payments, and billing, making financial oversight a key concern for school leaders.

30%

Montessori record keeping is a challenge.

30% of schools reported challenges managing observations, lesson progress, and student records across classrooms and program levels.

28%

Parent communication remains a challenge.

28% of schools reported difficulties maintaining consistent communication across classroom updates, school administration, and family interactions.

THE LEADERSHIP PRIORITY FOR 2027

Bring classroom and administrative operations together, giving Heads of School greater oversight, guides easier access to student records, and families a more connected experience while preserving Montessori educational practices.

Montessori Leadership Needs Purpose-Built Systems

Montessori leaders face decisions that directly shape the future of their schools: **where to invest resources, how to retain experienced guides, and how to maintain educational quality amid rising operating costs**. The challenge is balancing the financial realities of running a school with the long-term commitment to Montessori education.

These responsibilities are connected. The systems supporting them often are not.

A PERSPECTIVE FROM

Tim Seldin

President, The Montessori Foundation

“

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.



THE IMPLICATION FOR MONTESSORI LEADERSHIP

The objective is not to change Montessori education. It is to make the operations supporting it more effective.

MONTESSORI OPERATIONS TODAY

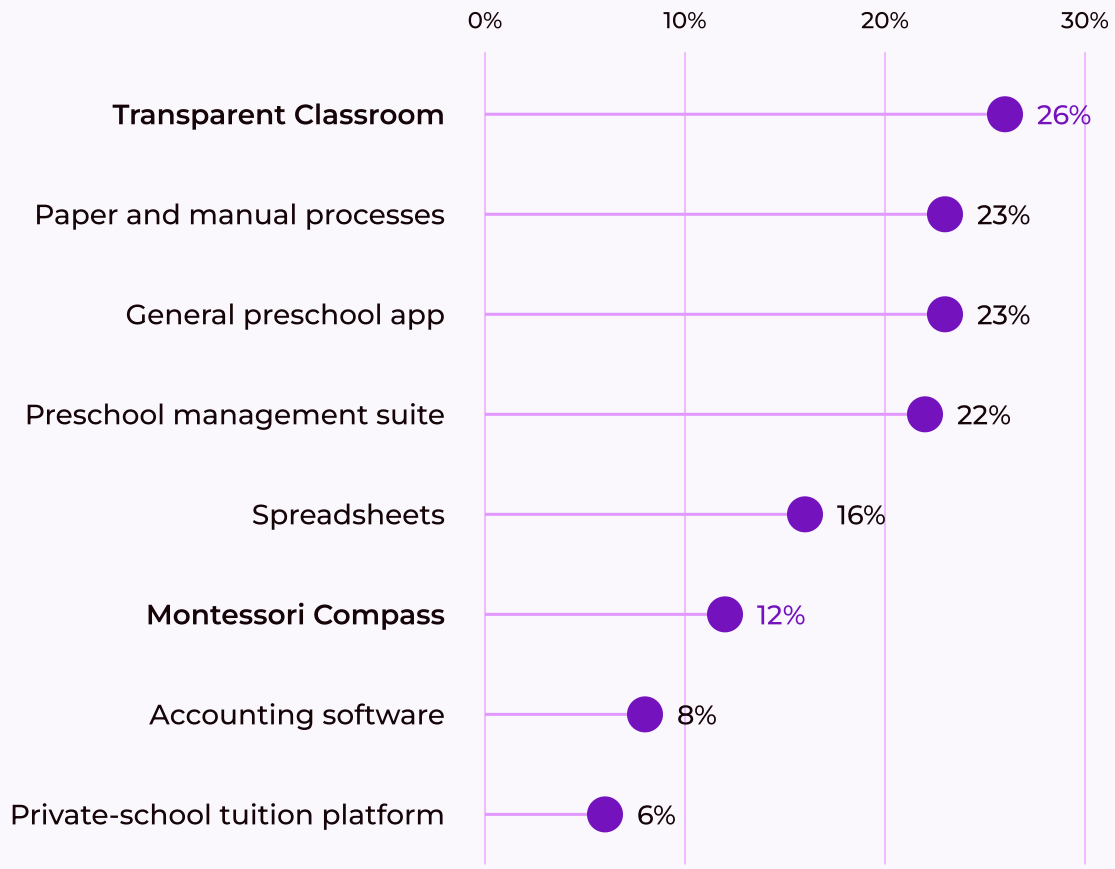
The state of Montessori operations

Montessori schools rely on a mix of specialized and general-purpose tools

Montessori schools have often adopted technology one need at a time. One platform supports classroom observations, while another system manages tuition, enrollment, or family communication. Each tool may serve its purpose, but the school leadership is left connecting information between them.

What Montessori schools use today

illumine spoke with 244 Montessori schools to understand their technology usage. Schools could name multiple tools, so percentages may exceed 100%.



63%

schools run two or more of these tools

The figures represent individual tools or process types that schools use for their daily operations.

“We’re literally on like 15 platforms right now.”

- Head of School, Montessori school, US.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Montessori-specific and general school management tools serve different purposes, but connecting them remains a challenge. The burden falls on school teams to keep information aligned, creating inefficiencies that extend beyond administration and affect overall school performance.

One Montessori school.
Multiple disconnected operations.

Montessori leaders are responsible for maintaining educational quality while protecting the financial and operational health of their schools. Yet critical information about enrollment, tuition, classroom progress, and family relationships often sits in separate systems.

Without a complete view of these functions, leaders may struggle to identify emerging risks, evaluate school performance, and make timely decisions. The absence of connected systems makes it harder for Montessori leaders to maintain accurate records, consistent processes, and reliable oversight across the school.

WHERE THE DISCONNECT HAPPENS

01

Classroom records

Guides document observations, lessons and individual progress in Montessori-specific platforms, often separate from the school's administrative records.

02

School administration

Enrollment, tuition, attendance and compliance are managed through different systems, requiring teams to manually update and reconcile information.

03

Family communication

Classroom updates, administrative notices and financial information are shared through separate channels, leaving families and school teams navigating multiple platforms.

04

Leadership visibility

Heads of school and multi-campus leaders must bring information together from different sources to understand enrollment, finances, classroom operations and emerging challenges.

The real challenge isn't the number of tools. **It's the lack of connection between the functions that keep a Montessori school running.**

The cost of operational inefficiency

The disconnect between school functions carries a cost that rarely appears in technology budgets. Software subscriptions represent only one part of a school's technology expenditure. The larger financial question is how much staff time is spent maintaining those systems, correcting discrepancies, training new team members, and preparing information for routine decisions.

These recurring activities represent an operational expense that is rarely measured or included in technology purchasing decisions. For Montessori leaders, understanding this total cost is essential to evaluating whether their existing technology is delivering sufficient value.

The administrative effort required to manage disconnected systems is far less obvious.

FOUR HIDDEN OPERATIONAL COSTS

01

Duplicate data entry

A single change to a student's enrollment or family details requires updates across multiple systems, increasing the risk of missed updates and inconsistent records.

02

Tuition reconciliation

Discrepancies between enrollment records, tuition plans, and payments force administrators to manually investigate billing errors, missed charges, and outstanding balances.

03

Repeated staff training

Every new guide or administrator must learn several platforms, prolonging onboarding and creating dependence on experienced staff for routine tasks.

04

Delayed reporting

By the time leadership teams consolidate data from different systems, enrollment shifts, revenue gaps, and emerging operational issues may already require urgent attention.

THE COST EXTENDS BEYOND ADMINISTRATION

For Montessori leaders, understanding these hidden costs is essential to making informed technology investments. The question is not simply what a school pays for its systems, but whether those systems are helping the school operate efficiently, use resources effectively, and support long-term financial sustainability.

MONTESSORI LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

The hidden burden on Heads of School

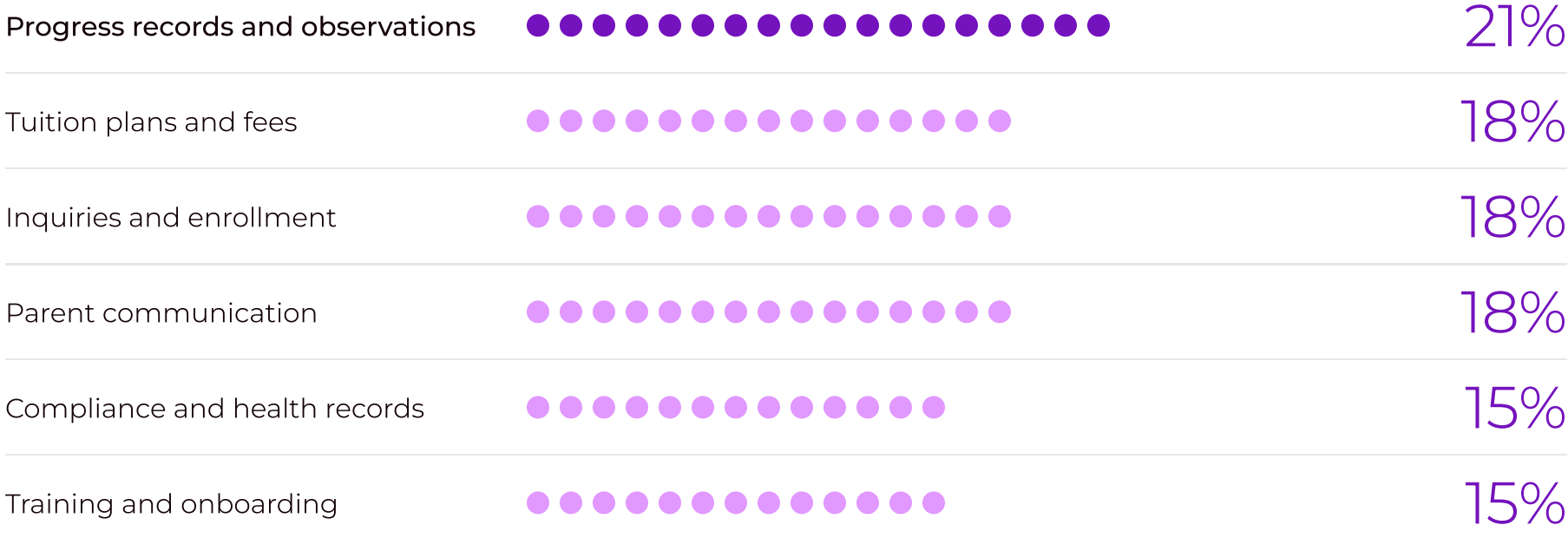
A Montessori Head of School must balance educational leadership with financial and operational accountability. Beyond guiding classroom practices and supporting guide development, they oversee student transitions, parent conferences, enrollment, tuition collection, regulatory requirements, and the resources needed to maintain well-prepared learning environments.

In schools with limited administrative support, coordinating technology and correcting information across systems can become another responsibility on an already demanding list.

> “
>
> Most preschools, and especially most Montessori schools, are like me. There’s one person doing everything.
>
> **Owner, Montessori school**

Operational challenges raised by Montessori leaders

Based on illumine's conversations with 85 Heads of School



Multiple challenges could be reported, so percentages may total more than 100%.

“She did 80 hours, two weeks of sick time. And I was like, no, the state requirement is 40 hours.”

Director, single-site school, on tracking staff records manually

“The people in my company who use Excel don’t know how to use it. Even more dangerous.”

Operator, 4-campus group in Florida

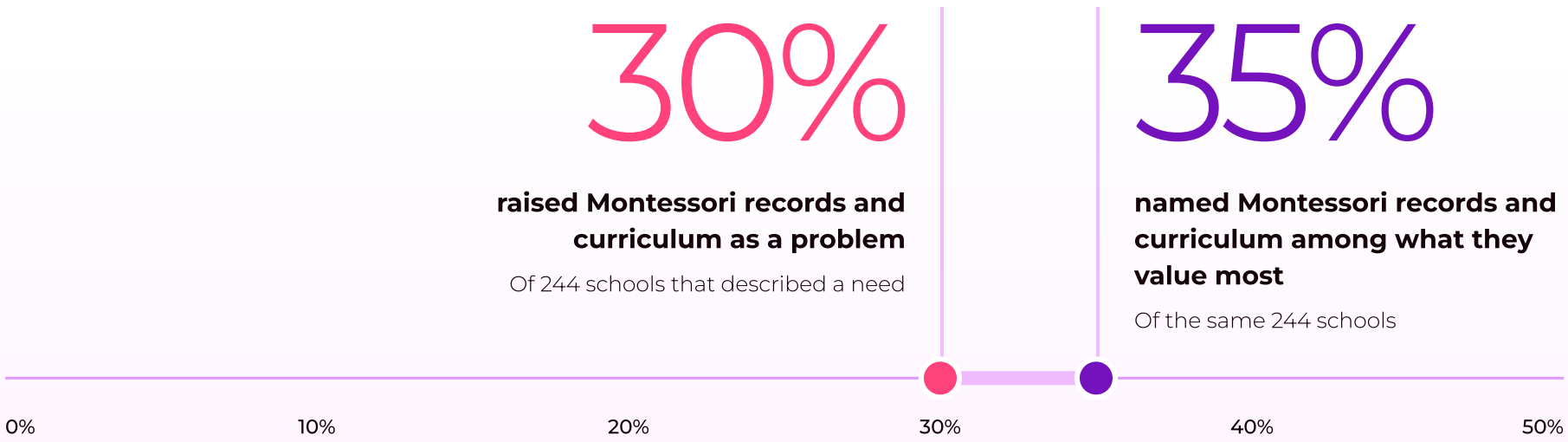
WHAT LEADERS SHOULD ASK

? If the person who understands your setup left tomorrow, what would break?

Montessori classroom excellence

In Montessori education, observation is central to understanding each child's development, planning lessons and adapting the prepared environment.

Guides track which lessons each child has been introduced to, practiced, and mastered, alongside observations of their development. When these records are scattered across notebooks, spreadsheets, and separate platforms, guides must spend additional time compiling progress histories and preparing conference reports.
When observations, progress tracking and conference reports are maintained separately, guides may spend more time organizing information and less time using it to support individualized learning.



This highlights a gap between the importance schools place on documenting each child's learning journey and the systems available to support that work effectively.

WHAT ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP LOSES

Disconnected documentation makes it harder to maintain consistent learning records, review progress across classrooms, prepare for conferences and support continuity as children move from Toddler to Children's House and Elementary. A Montessori record should help guides understand the child, not require them to reconstruct the child's journey. One conference report can mean pulling hundreds of records for a single child.

WHAT LEADERS SHOULD ASK

? Can guides follow a child's complete lesson and observation history without compiling records from separate places?

? Which classroom information do guides enter more than once, and do a child's records follow them from Toddler to Children's House to Elementary?

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

Families experience the gaps between systems first

Montessori education places significant importance on the partnership between school and family. That relationship depends on consistent communication, accurate information and a shared understanding of each child's progress.

Yet families may encounter disconnected processes throughout their school journey, from enrollment forms and tuition payments to classroom updates and re-enrollment.

28%

raised parent communication as a problem

Of 244 schools that described a need in conversation with illumine.

WHERE FAMILIES ENCOUNTER FRICTION · WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD illumine

01

A fragmented enrollment experience

Families are often asked to provide the same information multiple times during enrollment and re-enrollment, creating unnecessary friction in their school experience.

02

Inconsistent communication experience

Classroom updates, school announcements, and billing information spread across multiple channels make it harder for families to stay informed and engaged.

03

Limited visibility into child's progress

When classroom observations and family communication are managed separately, schools face difficulty presenting a clear, continuous picture of the child's learning journey.

THE LEADERSHIP IMPLICATION

These experiences shape how families perceive the school. They also create additional work for administrative teams responding to inquiries and resolving confusion.

A connected family experience should reflect the continuity Montessori schools work to provide in the classroom.

? WHAT LEADERS SHOULD ASK

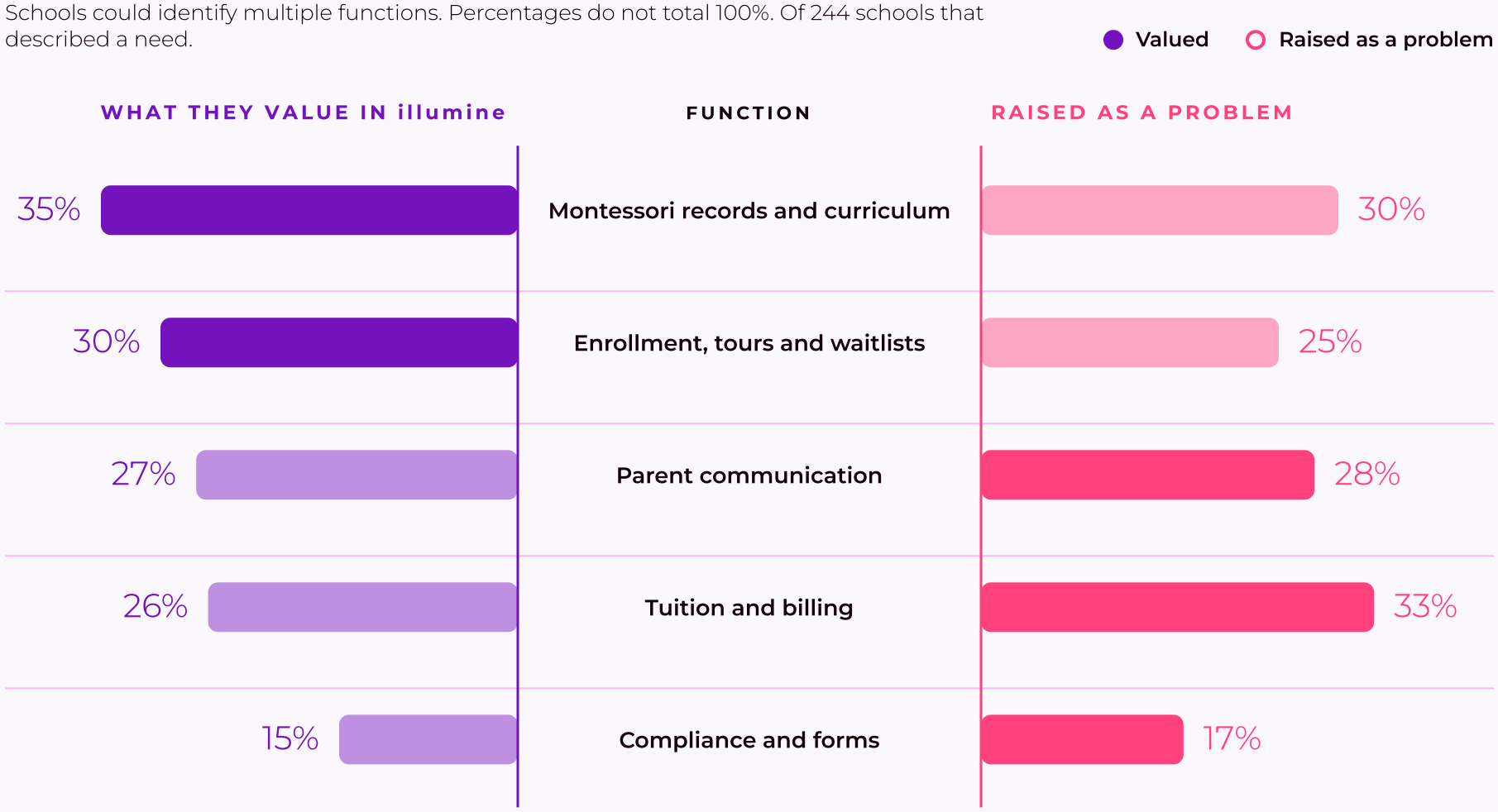
How many separate systems must a family use to complete routine tasks and stay informed about their child?

What schools prioritize versus where they struggle

The findings reveal an important distinction: schools recognize the importance of classroom documentation, enrollment, family communication, and billing, yet these same functions generate operational challenges. Strengthening classroom documentation, enrollment, family communication, and billing should therefore be central to improving school efficiency, educational continuity, and long-term sustainability.

The five functions schools value and raise as problems

Schools could identify multiple functions. Percentages do not total 100%. Of 244 schools that described a need.

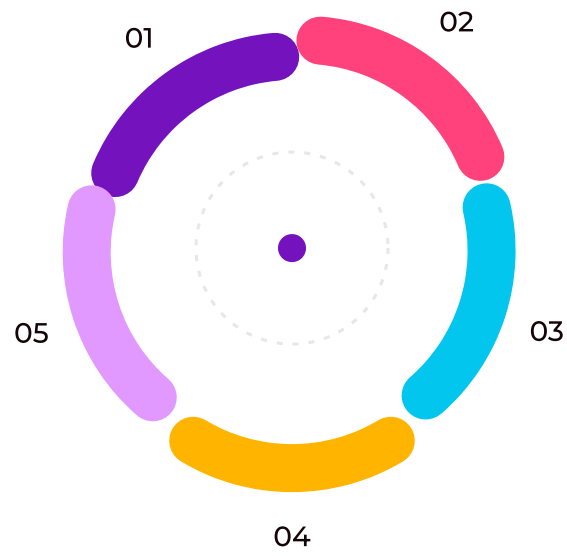


WHAT STANDS OUT

For Montessori leadership teams, these findings provide a practical starting point for improvement. Schools should prioritize the functions creating the greatest operational difficulties, particularly tuition and billing, without overlooking the Montessori records and curriculum capabilities they value most.

The goal should be to strengthen both educational documentation and financial management, rather than solving one problem while allowing another to persist.

When disconnected systems delay leadership decisions



Montessori leaders managing multiple campuses need to know which schools are struggling with enrollment, tuition collection, or staffing, so they can provide the right support at the right time.

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES	WHAT LEADERSHIP NEEDS
01 Revenue visibility Separate enrollment and billing systems make it harder for leaders to identify overdue payments, billing errors, and outstanding balances.	A reliable view of tuition billed, collected, outstanding and requiring attention.
02 Enrollment and classroom planning Disconnected admissions records make it hard to connect inquiries, enrollments, upcoming transitions and available classroom places.	Visibility into the enrollment pipeline alongside classroom capacity and staffing considerations.
03 Academic continuity Scattered lesson records and observations make it harder for leaders to track progress and ensure continuity in Montessori learning.	Consistent Montessori records that follow each child across classrooms and program levels.
04 Team capacity Repeated data entry, reconciliation, and manual reporting take valuable time away from supporting guides and families.	Fewer administrative handoffs and clear ownership of recurring processes.
05 Multi-campus oversight Different records and reporting methods across campuses make it harder for leadership to identify trends and compare performance.	Comparable reporting that supports both network standards and campus-level decisions.

THE LARGER LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

The true cost of fragmentation is not just the work being repeated. It is the decisions being delayed and the leadership attention being diverted.

CONNECTED SCHOOL OPERATIONS

A connected approach to Montessori school operations

A unified Montessori operating model is not simply one platform containing more features. Its value lies in keeping information connected across the child's learning journey and the processes supporting the school.

WHAT CONNECTED OPERATIONS SHOULD ENABLE

For multi-campus leadership
Common definitions and shared processes support reporting across schools while allowing appropriate differences in programs, tuition and local operations.

For academic leadership
Montessori scope and sequence, lesson records and progress information remain accessible to authorized team members, supporting continuity across classrooms.

For families
School information, routine forms, payments and approved classroom updates are available through a more consistent experience.

For heads of school
Enrollment, tuition, attendance, administrative records and family communication can be reviewed without reconstructing information from unrelated systems.

For guides
Individual observations, lesson presentations, progress records and conference reports remain connected, reducing the need to compile information repeatedly.

WHAT MATTERS MOST

A connected system allows schools to track each child's journey from enrollment through classroom progression, ensuring important information remains accessible at every stage.

As schools grow, this shared foundation helps leadership teams scale operations while protecting the individualized approach that defines Montessori education.

AI that supports

Montessori education is built on observation, independence, and the relationship between the guide and the child. AI should strengthen these foundations by reducing administrative demands, improving access to information, and giving guides more time to focus on individualized learning.

For Montessori leadership teams, the priority is to identify where AI can improve operational efficiency, support better decision-making, and deliver measurable value, while keeping educators in control of educational decisions.

WHAT SCHOOLS WANT AI FOR		THE CONDITION
Drafting daily notes and progress reports	→	A guide reviews and approves before anything is sent
Translating messages for families	→	The school decides what goes out, and when
Turning a guide's rough notes into something parents can read	→	The guide's judgment stays in the record

AI ADVANTAGE

AI built into every part of your school.

illumine's AI works across your whole school, not just one feature. Save hours every week.

AI Writing Assistant

Polished newsletters and parent updates in seconds.

AI Translate (20+ languages)

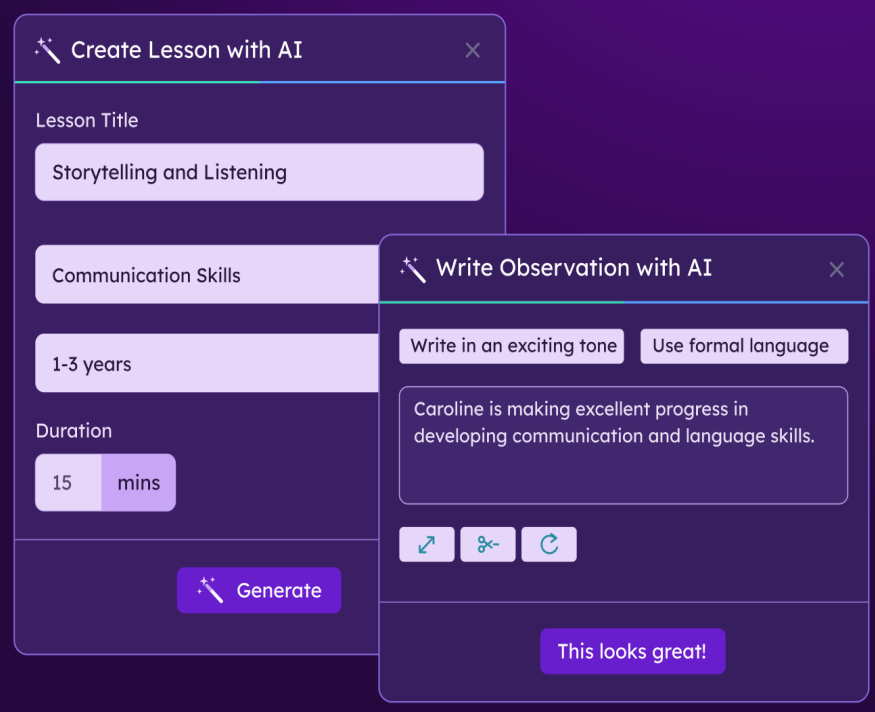
Instant translation for diverse Montessori families.

AI Daily Reports

Auto-tag students and generate observation summaries.

AI Lesson Generation

Personalized plans aligned to each child's Montessori level.



See illumine AI in action →

illumine: the complete Montessori school management software

illumine is an AI-native school management platform built for Montessori networks. illumine brings Montessori classroom records, enrollment, billing, and family communication into one AI-powered platform, helping school leaders manage finances and operations while giving guides more time to focus on children.

Parent Communication **Enrollments** **Montessori Records** **Tuition** **Student Observations**

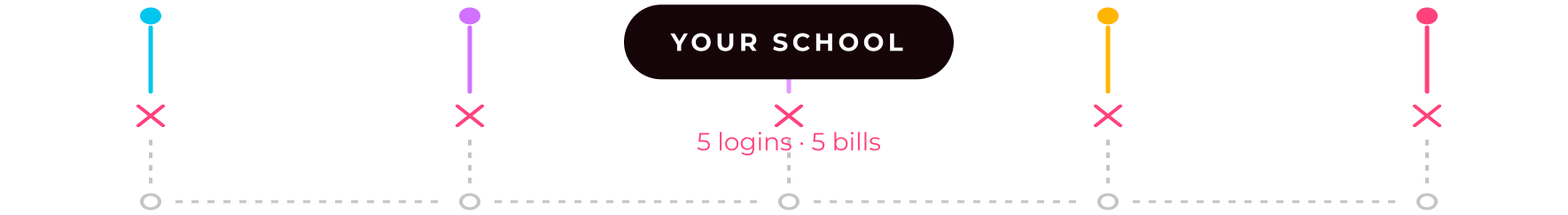
Try illumine for Montessori →

A new standard for Montessori operations

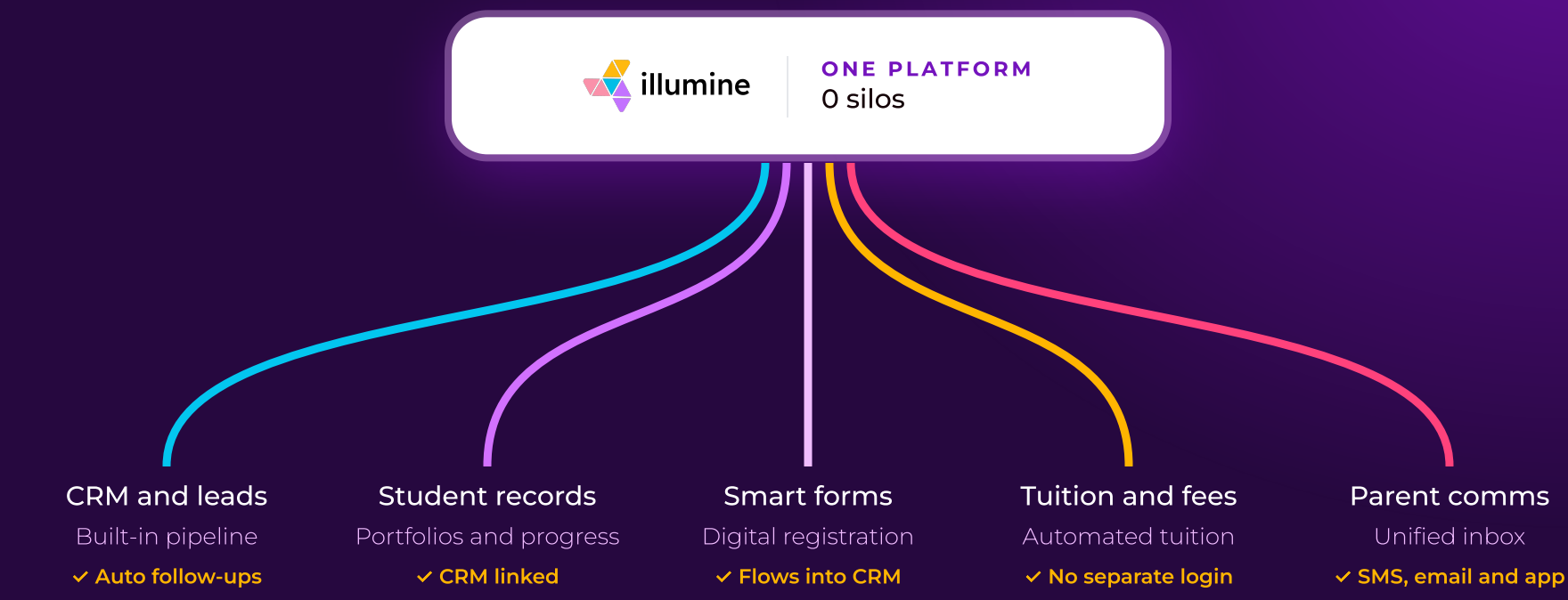
A unified system helps Montessori schools convert more inquiries into enrollments, improve tuition collection, strengthen family retention, and give guides more time with children. Leadership teams gain the ability to anticipate enrollment demand, identify revenue risks early, and make informed decisions that support sustainable growth.

illumine brings these capabilities together in one Montessori-focused platform, connecting admissions, billing, classroom records, and family communication to help schools achieve these outcomes while preserving the Montessori approach to education.

REALITY: SCHOOLS USE 4-5 SEPARATE TOOLS



CONNECTED: ONE PLATFORM



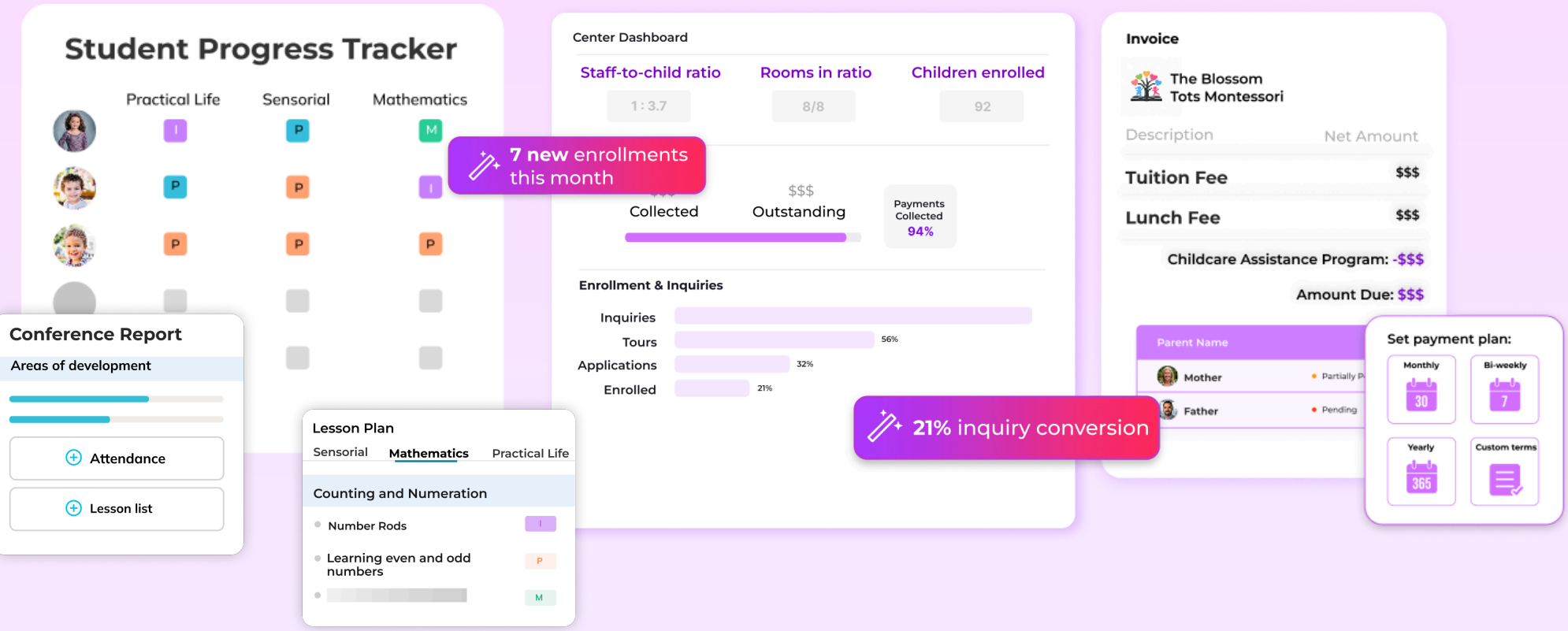
With illumine, Montessori leaders can make informed decisions about enrollment, revenue, resources, and growth. This means greater operational control, stronger financial planning, and more time to focus on quality Montessori education.

FOR MONTESSORI SCHOOL TEAMS

Empowering Heads of School to lead

illumine for Montessori

In most Montessori schools, the head of school is also the admissions office, the biller and the trainer. illumine takes the repeated work off that desk, so time goes back to guides and families. The goal is to enable Heads of School to run a strong school with less operational complexity.



Montessori Record Keeping

Lessons aligned to AMS and AMI scope and sequence. Create Conference Reports in seconds with templates.

Set up and manage tuition and financials

Tuition, payment plans and supported financial administration.

From inquiry to enrollment in one place

Admissions CRM, inquiries, tours, registration and enrollment workflows.

Multi-campus visibility

Visibility and oversight across multiple school locations.

With illumine, Heads of School can see how their schools are performing academically, financially, and operationally without relying on separate reports or systems. Leadership teams gain the information they need to make timely decisions while keeping Montessori education at the center of their work.

From operational data to better leadership decisions

Montessori leaders need more than visibility into daily operations. They need the ability to identify opportunities, anticipate challenges, and take action before they affect school performance. illumine connects enrollment, tuition, staffing-related information, and classroom operations, giving leadership teams a clearer foundation for planning and decision-making.

HOW illumine HELPS LEADERS MAKE BETTER DECISIONS

01

Forecast enrollment and optimize capacity

Track inquiries, applications, waitlists, upcoming enrollments, and classroom availability to identify growth opportunities and plan admissions more effectively.

02

Protect tuition revenue

Monitor invoices, payments, and outstanding balances in one place to identify collection gaps, address overdue payments, and strengthen financial oversight.

03

Plan resources more effectively

Bring enrollment projections, classroom attendance, and operational information together to support staffing discussions, resource allocation, and planning for upcoming academic cycles.

04

Strengthen multi-campus performance

Use centralized reporting to review school-level performance, identify differences across campuses, and prioritize locations that need additional leadership attention.

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illumine brings together enrollment, communication, billing, and operational workflows into one platform while providing visibility at every level of the organization.

Matthew Sears SVP Technology, Guidepost Montessori

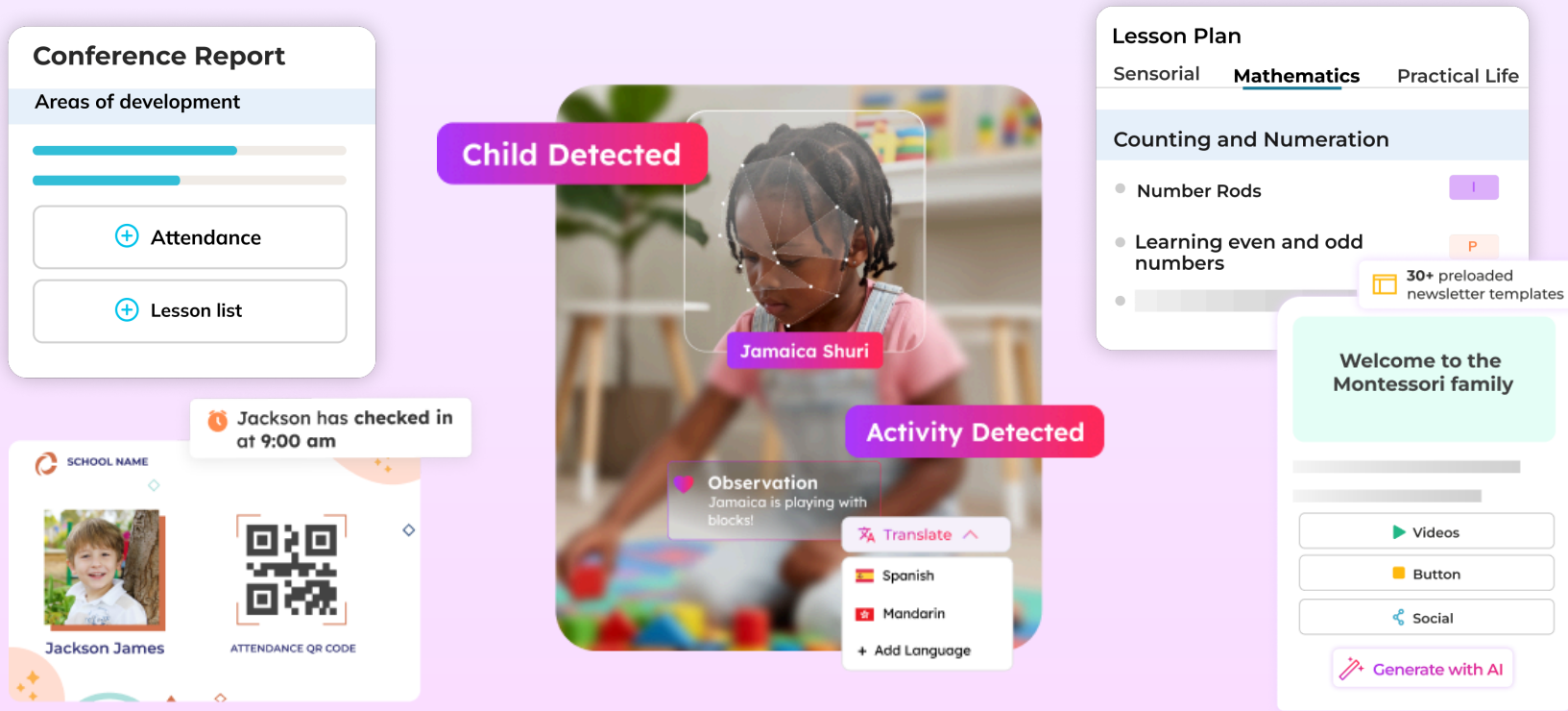
guidepost montessori



Academic heads and guides: everything in one place

Records, progress, attendance, conference reports and family updates sit in one Montessori school operations software, so guides spend their time with children and academic heads see every classroom the same way.

MONTESSORI RECORDS | CONFERENCE REPORTS | ATTENDANCE | PARENT COMMUNICATION



illumine helps Montessori guides and academic leaders manage classroom learning through **connected lesson plans, observations, progress tracking, and conference reports.** Guides can document each child's progress directly from the classroom, while academic leaders maintain oversight of AMI- or AMS-aligned lesson sequences, ensure consistency across classrooms, and review updates before they reach families. With AI-assisted documentation and a shared lesson library, schools can reduce repetitive work, support new guides, and dedicate more time to individualized Montessori learning.

Attendance and ratios

Access to attendance and relevant ratio information.

Real Montessori record keeping

Montessori lesson and learning records, including conference reports.

Observations made easy

Capture observations and follow each child's progress.

Conference reports and newsletters

Communicate classroom updates and relevant information to families.

AI GOVERNANCE AND TRUST

AI governance: protecting data, people and decisions

AI adoption brings new responsibilities for Montessori leadership teams. Protecting sensitive student records, controlling access to information, and ensuring human oversight of AI-generated content are essential to maintaining family trust and safeguarding Montessori educational practices.

Protecting the information Montessori families trust schools with:

A child's health notes · Custody arrangements · Pickup authorizations · Observations and progress records

FIVE GOVERNANCE COMMITMENTS FOR A CONNECTED, AI-ENABLED SCHOOL

1.	Role-based access	Every person sees only what their role requires. A head of school sees the school; a guide sees their classroom; families see their child.
2.	Approvals and audit trails	Tuition overrides, discounts and write-offs follow defined approval paths, and every change to a child's record is logged.
3.	Privacy controls	Family and classroom data is not used to train general-purpose models without explicit consent.
4.	Human review at defined points	AI drafts, summarizes and flags. Guides and school leaders decide on anything involving a child's development, safety or a sensitive family conversation.
5.	Independent assurance	Security controls are audited by a third party, not only described by the vendor.

illumine brings these governance principles into Montessori school operations through role-based access controls, defined approval workflows, audit trails, and human oversight of AI-assisted processes. With SOC 2 Type II–audited security controls, illumine helps Montessori leadership teams adopt AI responsibly while maintaining control over school data, educational decisions, and family trust.

ABOUT illumine

illumine

The complete Montessori school management software.

illumine is an AI-native platform for Montessori schools and networks, unifying enrollment, billing, attendance, family communication, and Montessori-specific lesson tracking, observations, and student progress. illumine reduces paperwork for guides, strengthens financial and operational oversight for Heads of School, and supports consistent Montessori practices across campuses.

For multi-campus Montessori networks, illumine provides centralized visibility into enrollment, finances, and school performance while allowing each campus to maintain its unique programs and operational needs.

Move to America's #1 Montessori platform with ease

WEEK 1

White-Glove Migration

We handle data transfer, system configuration, and account setup so your team doesn't lift a finger.

WEEK 2

Role-Based Training

Live training sessions tailored for directors, teachers, and admin staff. Everyone is confident from day one.

ONGOING

Dedicated Support

Your success manager provides regular check-ins, strategic guidance, and responsive support as you grow.

Trusted by 500+ Montessori schools globally

AMI and AMS aligned

SOC 2 certified

Try illumine →