

# Montessori's Appeal Across Communities:

## Racial and Socioeconomic Factors in School Choice

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### RESEARCH QUESTION

What factors are prioritized by parents when choosing schools, and how do these characteristics relate to the components of the Montessori model? Are there differences by race and SES?

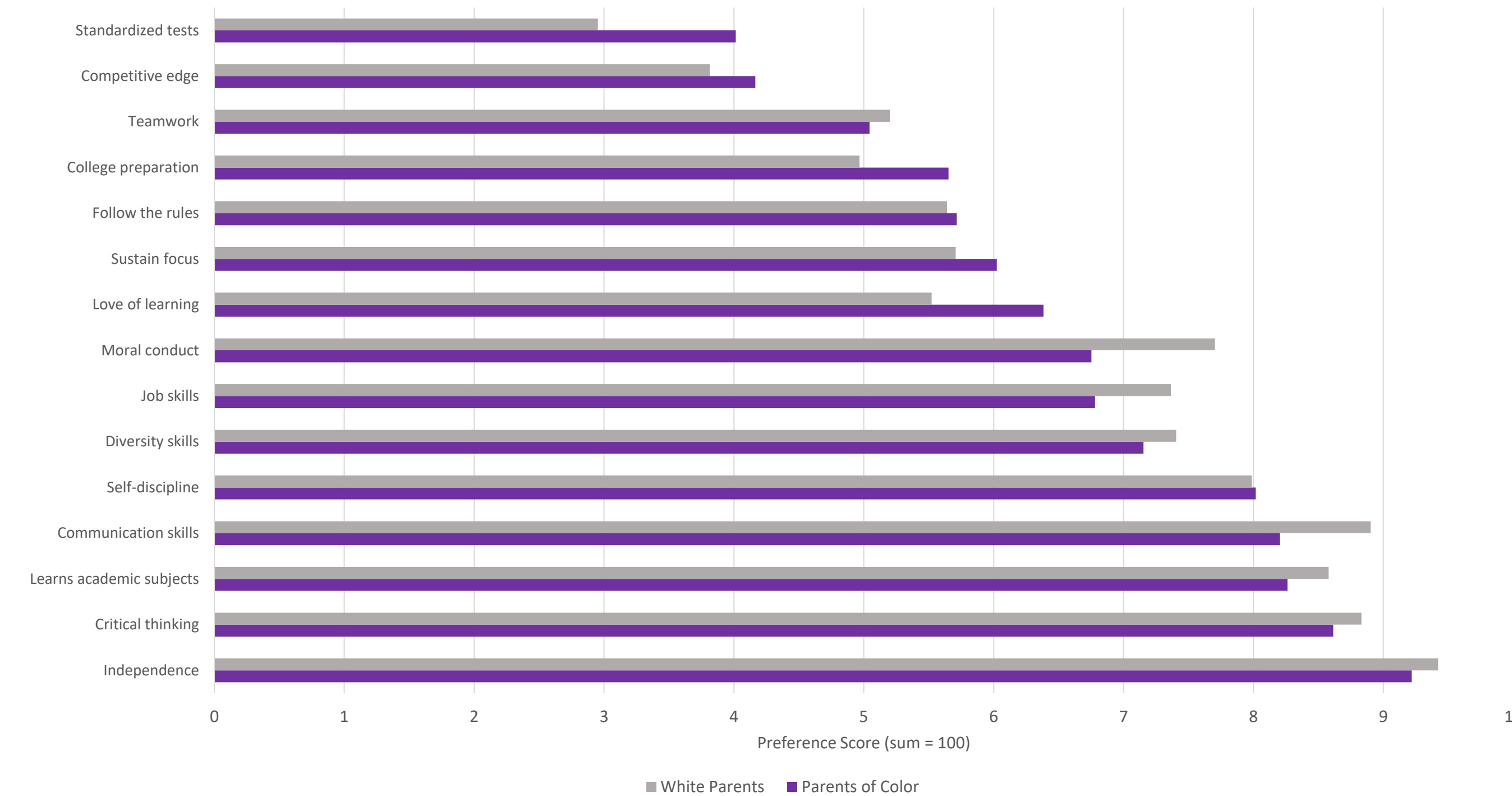
### RESEARCH METHODS

Between September to October 2022, a national survey of parents of children aged 0-17 years old was organized. A quota sampling method was used to create the sample. The sample matches the demographics of American adults based on race/ethnicity, income, and education. In total, 750 respondents participated in the survey, although the sample sizes for the analyses are smaller because of missing data. The questionnaire employed a Best/Worst Scaling or MaxDiff question format in which parents were given 5 different items at a time and were asked to identify the item that they thought was the most critical educational goal for their child to attain and which of the five was least critical. The respondent completed this task 9 different times, which allowed researchers to estimate a ranking across 15 different items. Additionally, parents were also presented a set of questions about their views on teaching and learning in which parents would place themselves between two statements, which allowed researchers to identify which aspects of Montessori were most appealing. The questionnaire also included a battery of demographic questions that allowed researchers to consider how responses differed by subgroup. Our main comparisons are between Parents of Color (n = 182) and White parents (n = 568) and between parents with a 2-year Associate's Degree or more (n = 378) and those with less education (n = 372).

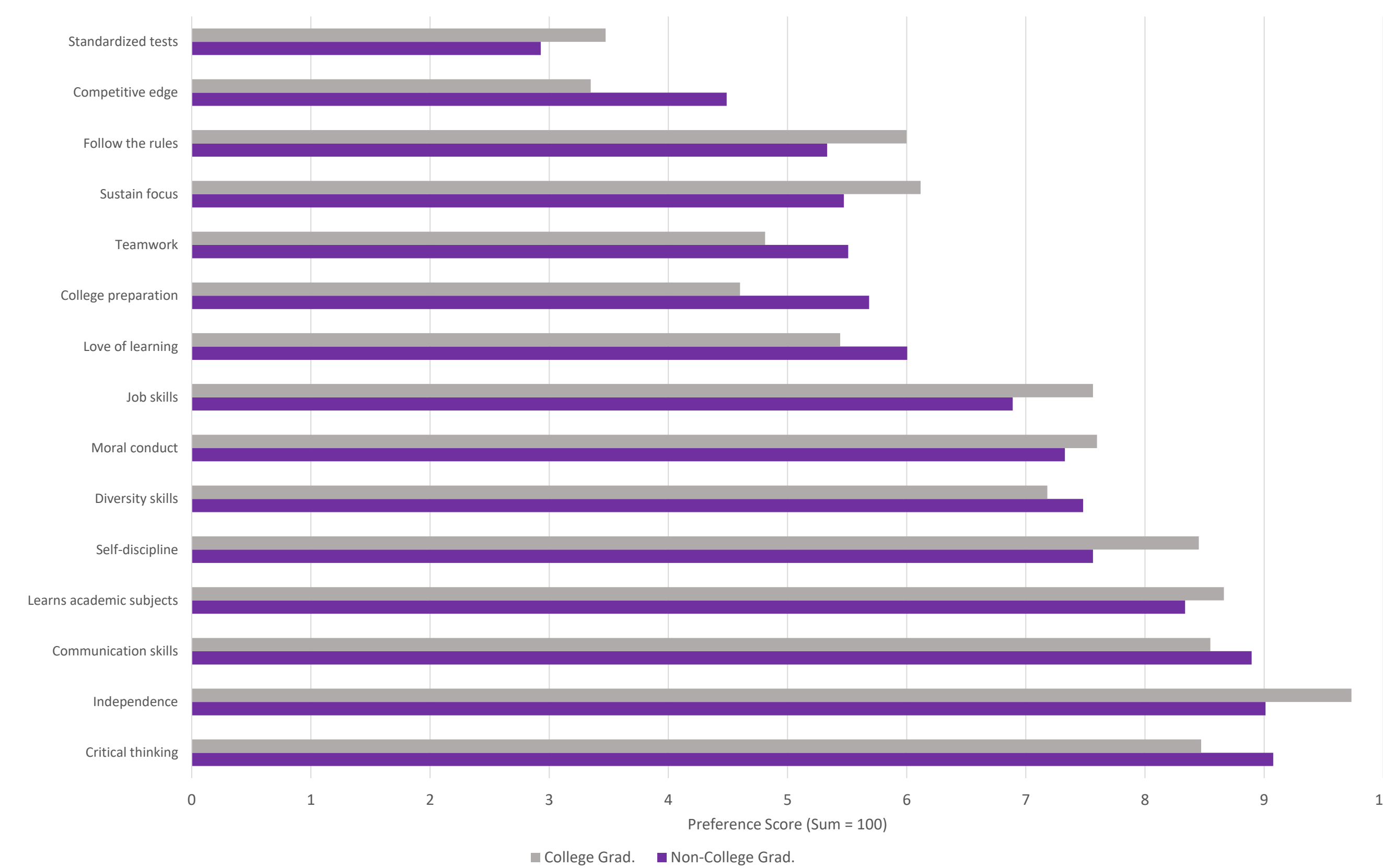
### FINDINGS

First, we estimated what goals parents thought were the most critical for them to attain in school. Parents were presented with 15 competing goals. Parents most preferred students gaining self-sufficiency or independence. They also emphasized critical thinking and communication skills. These outcomes are consistent with the Montessori model. The goals that parents least preferred were doing well on standardized tests and “gaining a competitive edge in life.” In fact, building independence was approximately three times as preferred as doing well on standardized tests. We then examined if preferences regarding educational goals differed by subgroup. We first compared Parents of Color and White parents. Generally, rankings were quite similar between the two groups, as both sets of parents had independence as the most important education goal and doing well on standardized tests as the least important. There were differences, however. White parents ranked communication skills as the second most important goal, while it was the fourth most important for Parents of Color. White parents were more likely to emphasize moral conduct, while Parents of Color emphasized love of learning.

How Do Educational Goals Differ by Race?

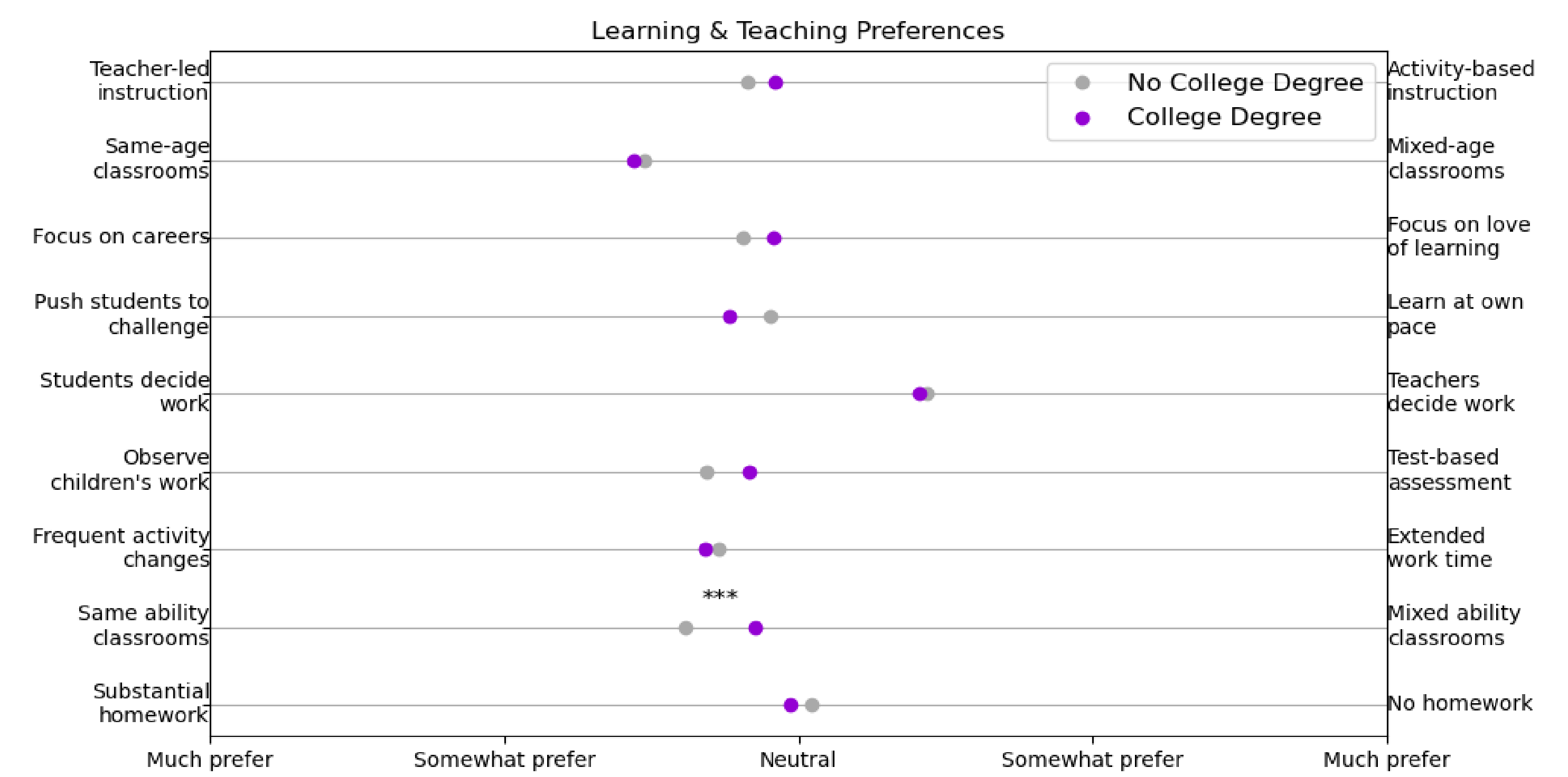
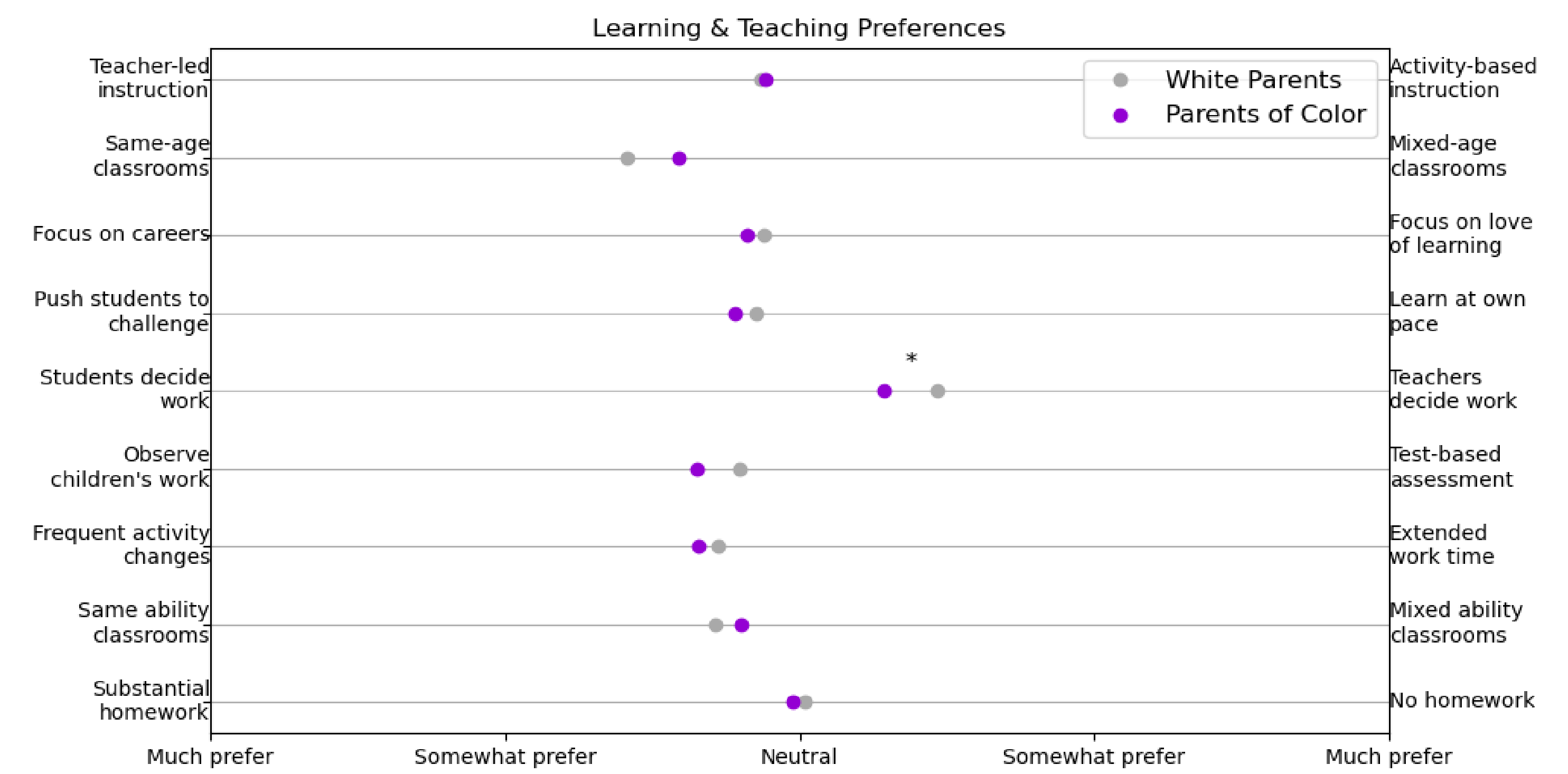


How Do Educational Goals Differ by Parental Education?



We performed a similar analysis, comparing parents by their level of education. Parents with a college degree ranked independence, learning academic subjects, being able to sustain focus, and following the rules as relatively more important than parents without a college degree. Conversely, parents without a college degree were more likely to emphasize critical thinking skills, being able to work with people from diverse backgrounds, fostering a love of learning, and being prepared for college.

Parents were given a set of opposing options regarding approaches to teaching and learning. They were then asked which option they preferred. Overall, our results indicate that parents statistically significantly preferred one approach that is consistent with Montessori education, which was a preference for evaluating students based on teacher observations rather than tests. However, parents preferred teacher-led instruction, same-age classrooms, a career focus, teachers deciding what students should work on, frequent activity changes, and same-ability classrooms. When Parents of Color were compared to White Parents, the only significant difference was that white parents were more supportive of teachers, rather than students, deciding what students should work on. A comparison of parents with different levels of education found one significant difference. Parents with no college degree were more likely to prefer same-ability classrooms.



### DISCUSSION

Our results demonstrate that many of the educational goals that parents prefer are similar to those highlighted by the Montessori model. Proponents of Montessori should emphasize how Montessori education is consistent with what parents are looking for in their children's schools. However, our study also shows that many of the components of the Montessori model face some skepticism from parents. Montessorians will need to communicate to parents the benefits of Montessori's approach to learning and teaching. Our analysis found that different subgroups of parents generally have similar views on educational goals and learning preferences.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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