



**MONTESSORI
COUNTRY SCHOOL**

Montessori Country School

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“Scientific observation then has established that education is not what the teacher gives; education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment”

Parent Handbook

Welcome

Welcome to Montessori Country School! We look forward to working with you and your children during these very important years. The Montessori experience at MCS begins in infancy and culminates with 6th grade. Each year, the program provides building blocks for the years to come.

The staff at Montessori Country School has a deep appreciation and respect for all children. We believe every child is full of great potential and is a fresh expression of life's natural movement toward growth and independence. The Montessori classroom will provide your children with a world of their own. As they explore the classroom materials and participate in school activities, they will be making many discoveries about themselves and their environment. Your children will be encouraged to explore, create, problem solve, and become their own teachers. Respected for their uniqueness, they will develop respect for themselves and others. They will be encouraged to learn not only from the materials and teachers, but from their peers as well.

The goals of the Montessori Country School staff are to help children:

1. Develop enthusiasm for new and challenging experiences.
2. Initiate and complete tasks independently.
3. Grow in their self-confidence and independence.
4. Develop self-discipline and inner motivation.
5. Develop a sense of respect for, and care of, the environment.
6. Develop a deep respect for themselves and each other.

We believe children learn best in a non-competitive environment where mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning another way of doing things. Children benefit from the security of knowing that there is someone close by to help, but they also need room to grow and to explore on their own. In essence, the phrase, "Help me to do it by myself," describes the direction of Montessori education.

This Parent Handbook is offered to help you better understand our school philosophy, curriculum, procedures, and policies; it is designed to be used throughout your child's time at Montessori Country School. This is not meant to be a contract or agreement. Policies may be adjusted as necessary. We will keep you advised of any changes through memos, posted notes, or a revised handbook.

You have a great adventure ahead of you as you watch your child in these early school years. We feel privileged to be a part of this process. Please feel free to call or to come in and visit at any time. Your questions are always welcome.

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GENERAL INFORMATION

HISTORY

Montessori Country School was founded in 1972 by Julie Rynearson and Dorothy King. The first classroom was in Julie's home located in the Port Madison neighborhood. In 1978, Montessori Country School applied for and was granted non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation status. In 1979, the school had outgrown its Pt. Madison location and moved to the Arrow Point Drive location. In 1986, Dorothy King retired as Director and her daughter, Patty Christensen, was hired as the new Head of School.

Within a few years of Patty's leadership, she was encouraged by the parents to expand into the elementary years. We opened an elementary program in 1988, offering a program for first through third graders. The program grew quickly, and in 1994 the decision was made to release the elementary program to an independent board under the direction of the elementary teacher, and Voyager Montessori Elementary School was founded. In 2013, the boards of both schools decided to consolidate effective with the 2013-2014 school year. That same year, Patty Christensen retired and Meghan Kane Skotheim assumed the position of HOS. In 2014, the Board embarked on a capital campaign and the vision of a combined campus emerged. In the fall of 2017, the Country School community moved into its new campus on Arrow Point Dr. MCS now offers a strong Montessori program for infants through sixth grade students. Julie and Dorothy built the school around their core belief that the early years are the most important years in life. Although our founders are no longer with us, their legacies live on at MCS.

PHILOSOPHY

Fundamental to the Montessori Country School's philosophy is Dr. Montessori's belief that the child possesses within himself an intense motivation toward self-construction. In order for the child to "construct" himself intellectually, physically, emotionally, and socially to his fullest potential, he must be given the freedom to explore and to experience his environment. The "prepared environment" is key to the Montessori philosophy. The Montessori classroom is a place where the child has an opportunity to follow his own interests and fulfill his natural desire for knowledge and independence in a noncompetitive atmosphere. The classroom offers an orderly environment, which not only gives the child a feeling of security, but also allows him the freedom to function, as much as possible, independently of the adults in the room. The teacher or "aware adult" serves as a link between the child and the environment. Through careful observation, s/he invites the child to receive lessons appropriate to his development and interests. As the Montessori philosophy is built on the child's natural desire for learning, the child can learn with joy and can maintain his self-motivation for continuous learning throughout life.

In her book, Education for a New World, p. 3, Maria Montessori stated, "Scientific observation then has established that education is not what the teacher gives;

education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment." We feel that education is "a natural process" which must take into account the whole child. Montessori spoke to her trainees often of "following the child." By this she meant to remind us that by observing children, we would be guided by them as to their needs. It is our intent to keep this idea at the forefront of our hearts and minds in all decisions we make regarding the children.

ORGANIZATION

Montessori Country School is organized as a non-profit 501(c)(3) corporation, governed by a Board of Trustees. The Head of School is hired by the Board and directs the day-to-day operation of the school, as well as the hiring of the faculty and staff. The Board of Trustees sets policy, approves the budget, and oversees the general operation of the school.

THE MONTESSORI CURRICULUM

PARENT AND INFANT

The Parent/Infant community provides a warm, nurturing, and stimulating environment that allows children and parents to learn together in a Montessori environment designed specifically for the development of infants.

The class is held one day a week for 1.5 hours. During this time, the role of the parent is to observe their child in a Montessori environment. Parents will work side by side with a trained guide to help support their child's natural development. Parents will be provided with observation journals and guidance on how to observe their child daily. During class, we will discuss observations and any questions that arise with the Montessori guides and other parents. We will also have group discussions on topics pertaining specifically to the young child; some of those topics will include:

- Development of Language
- Development of Movement
- Development of Independence
- Nutrition and First foods
- Toilet Learning
- Positive Guidance
- Healthy sleep routines
- The hand as the instrument of the brain
- Positive attachments
- Preparing the home environment

Our goal in creating an Infant/Parent program is to provide a space where infants and parents gather to create a community built on education and support.

TODDLER CURRICULUM

During the early years of life, Dr. Maria Montessori felt that "the first thing the child's education demands is the provision of an environment in which he or she can develop the powers given by nature." Quite literally, the school environment is the curriculum. Dr. Montessori emphasized the need for a rich environment and noted the speed at which children can develop: "If our own adult ability be compared with the child's, we should need sixty years of hard work to do what he or she does in three." The Montessori teaching method provides a basis for individualized learning activities, appropriate for even the earliest stages of a child's development.

The purpose of the Toddler Program at MCS is to provide an environment that will encourage, assist, and protect the normal development of each child. The children flourish in the carefully prepared environment, which respects and responds to their basic needs for independence, exploration, and the building of trust and self-esteem.

The structure of the curriculum is based on five developmental areas: Sensory and Perceptual, Physical and Motor, Self-Help Skills, Language, and Social and Emotional.

Sensory and Perceptual

Young children absorb the world around them through the five senses. The classroom is set up to stimulate all the child's senses. Special attention is given to the selection of materials and activities that represent various textures, weights, fragrances, temperatures, sounds, color intensity, shapes etc.

Physical and Motor

Along with the mind, both fine and gross motor skills develop rapidly during these early years. Physical activity is crucial to the young child. Care is taken in setting up the Toddler environment to respect the child's need for movement. As children manipulate the environment, they exercise and refine their motor skills. This is a natural process and can easily be observed as a child carries a tray to a table, moves a chair, manipulates a knobbed puzzle, or masters buttoning on the button frame. Self-confidence develop as they begin to master their movements and manipulate their environment. Dr. Montessori clearly understood that learning for the young child can only take place when the child's need for movement is respected.

Self-Help Skills

The Toddler child is eager to master his environment. A typical phrase of a child this age is "I do it." The classroom is set up to allow your child as many opportunities as possible to "do it myself." Children will be encouraged to hang up their own coat, to tidy up after a spill, to choose their own "work," and to put it back on the shelf. Activities are available to allow your child to practice manipulating buttons, zippers, Velcro, etc. You can encourage your child's natural desire for independence by allowing time to "do it myself".

Language

This is a critical time for the development of language, as you can see by your child's interest in communicating verbally. The construction of vocabulary is a part of every aspect of the classroom from snack time or manipulating a toy, to group activities, which include songs, stories, and finger plays. It is important to remember that children develop their ability to communicate verbally at various times. Your child can be encouraged to communicate using words, but this is not something that can be pushed. You can encourage your child's language development through the daily reading of picture books, by talking to your child about what you are seeing and doing, and offering vocabulary as often as possible.

Social and Emotional

The Toddler classroom is a wonderful place for your child to begin to develop social skills. Toddler children are apt to be very possessive with their belongings. The classroom offers a neutral environment where all activities are shared by all the children. When children choose an activity, it is "theirs" only for the time they are using it, and when they are finished it is placed back on the shelf for others to use. Children will be encouraged to express their needs and desires to peers and teachers. Your child's emotional well-being is nurtured in the classroom. Treated with love and respect, the children develop a sense of trust in themselves and those around them. They experience the classroom as a place where one can freely explore and experiment; a place where making a mistake is the perfect learning opportunity.

PRIMARY 3-6 CURRICULUM

The Primary Program begins for children whose third birthday falls on or before August 31st and continues through what has, in traditional education, been called the "Kindergarten" year. Each year the child builds on the skills developed the year before. We acknowledge the individual timetable for each child. Three or four years in the classroom gives the child the opportunity to learn at a pace that is comfortable and natural. The mixed age group provides each child with classmates of varying interests and levels of development. This allows the children the opportunity to teach as well as to learn from their peers. The Kindergarten year is a culmination of all the preparation the child has done during the preschool years. As the oldest children in the class, tremendous self-esteem is developed as they take on the leadership role. Through extensive use of the beautiful Montessori materials, the children graduate from the MCS primary program with a sound understanding of concepts and with a strong sense of themselves in the learning environment. A very special ceremony is held for our graduates at their completion of the program.

Dr. Maria Montessori believed that no human being is educated by another person; she must do it by herself. A truly educated individual continues learning long after the hours and years spent in the classroom. A person is motivated from within by a natural curiosity and love for knowledge. Therefore, Dr. Montessori felt that the goal of education should not be to fill the child with facts from a pre-selected course of studies, but rather to cultivate the child's own natural desire to learn.

In the Montessori classroom, this cultivation of the child's natural desire to learn is encouraged by allowing each child the opportunity to experience the excitement of learning by one's own choice rather than by being forced, and by helping the child perfect the natural tools for learning.

Practical Life Exercises

The whole process of self-education begins with the practical life activities. For young children, there is something special about tasks that an adult considers ordinary – washing dishes, paring vegetables, polishing shoes, folding laundry, etc. These activities boost children's self-confidence as they begin to develop independence. There is no greater joy for children than to realize they are a part of the important daily tasks of life at home. Imitation is one of the strongest urges during children's early years.

When we talk about the exercises of practical life, we put an emphasis on the word "life." These exercises are preparation for life; they help the child become a unified person with body, mind, and self-will working together. As children master the skills in the practical life exercises, they develop independence, coordination of movement, the ability to concentrate, and increased self-confidence. The practical life exercises give the child the opportunity to learn to pay attention to detail within a regular sequence of activity. In addition, they help the child experience a "cycle of work," learning to prepare a workspace, sequence activities, complete the task, and put the materials away. Through the exercises in practical life, the child absorbs specific attributes of the culture.

As the class learns of other cultures, activities in practical life will reflect attributes of that culture. Children of all ages are absorbed by the activities in the practical life area of the classroom.

In the beginning, children do the exercises for themselves. Eventually, as they develop the skills, they begin to share their abilities with the classroom community. For instance, a child may sweep the classroom, help prepare snack, or use a newly acquired skill of chair washing for the benefit of the community.

Practical life activities are the very foundation on which the whole process of intellectual development rests. To pursue academic work the child needs to be able to control movements, sequence activities, and concentrate deeply. The development of these skills happens through the practical life exercises.

You can support your child's interest in this area by giving opportunities to help you with household tasks. There is nothing that nurtures children's self-esteem more than working side-by-side with those they love. This gives one the feeling that their contributions count and that they are very important parts of the community.

Sensorial Exercises

Since the time of Aristotle, it has been recognized that "there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses." It is from the information supplied by the senses that people create the abstract ideas with which to make comparisons and judgments.

The purpose of Montessori sensorial materials is two-fold:

- 1) To help the child classify and clarify his environment
- 2) To help the child arrive at clear abstraction and rational thinking

Because of the natural urge to explore, the child starts school with a wealth of sensorial experiences. It is not necessary for the school to give the child new sensorial experiences, but rather to help organize the existing sensorial impressions through conscious classification. The Montessori materials offer the child the means for a "sensory education." Each piece of material presents an idea or concept in a concrete form that is always combined with an activity. Through work with these materials, the child develops concepts of size, color, shape, weight, etc. In the process of learning concepts, the child's mind is developed and becomes ordered and capable of rational thinking with clear judgments and logical thought. Thus, through the use of the material, the child is training to observe, to make comparisons between objects, to form judgments, and to reason; eventually developing the ability to explore the world and analyze its sensorial attributes.

You can support your child's interest in this area by allowing time to absorb experiences through all senses. Time spent outdoors in all kinds of weather gives your child a tremendous opportunity to develop refined senses.

Mathematics

The maxim "never give more to the mind than is given to the hand" certainly holds true in the Montessori math curriculum. Dr. Montessori demonstrated that if children have access to mathematical equipment in their early years, they easily and joyfully

assimilate mathematical concepts and many facts and skills of arithmetic. Without a conceptual understanding, acquiring mathematical facts and skills may require long hours of drudgery and drill. With the Montessori math materials, children become as comfortable with quantities and relations of numbers as they are with spoken and written language. Dr. Montessori designed concrete materials to represent the mathematical quantities of our decimal and linear system after she observed that children who become interested in counting like to touch or move items as they enumerate them. By combining, separating, sharing, counting, and comparing the materials, they can demonstrate to themselves the basic operations of mathematics.

Children are always given a concrete representation of a quantity before being given the written symbol representing the quantity. We begin with 1-10 materials conserved and move to loose quantities. As children are ready, we introduce the symbol in and out of order. This continues throughout the curriculum. For example, they play the "bank game" with the golden bead material, which gives them a concrete impression of the difference between a unit, ten, hundred, and a thousand before being given the written symbols (that is, 1, 10, 100, 1000).

When the children want to do arithmetic, they work the problems with specially designed equipment and often record their results on paper. The operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division are introduced with the beautifully designed decimal system materials using 4 digit numbers. Operations are performed with a variety of materials. This variety maintains the children's interest while giving them many opportunities for the necessary repetition. Through the manipulation of these materials, the children begin committing the math facts to memory while gaining an understanding of the concept of each operation. Additionally, math is spread throughout the curriculum as we count children, divide snack, or talk about the passage of time.

Spoken Language

The Montessori teacher understands that language development begins long before a child enters the classroom. The child of preschool age has a keen interest in, and sensitivity to, language. From the beginning, language is integrated into all areas of the curriculum. The individual presentation of language materials in a Montessori classroom allows the teacher to take advantage of each child's greatest period of interest.

Vocabulary development and communication skills are integral parts of the classroom. The child of this age loves words and self-expression. The proper names of things are given in all areas of interest. Self-expression is encouraged throughout the day — during group sharing time, in the course of learning conflict resolution skills, and in the moment-to-moment interactions with their peers and teachers. The classroom is a relaxed environment and conversation is taking place constantly.

Hearing is critical to the development of spoken as well as written language. Games are played to help the child develop listening skills. Songs, finger plays, rhyming games, as well as the silence game, are a part of every day

Pre-Reading

Reading is cultivated as the child's most important key to future learning. The child in the classroom is encouraged to explore books for answers to questions, as well as for the sheer pleasure and relaxation of enjoying a good book. *The greatest gift parents can give their children is to read aloud to them every day. There is nothing that will help your children more in preparing them to become passionate readers.*

The Montessori teacher is preparing the child for reading long before s/he reads the first word. It can be said that all activity in the Montessori classroom is in some way preparing the child for the reading process: movement exercises, body awareness games, puzzles, listening games, the activities of practical life, the sensorial materials, and group time activities all prepare the child for the reading process. In addition, when possible, all lessons are presented to the child in a left to right, top to bottom sequence. This begins with the presentation of practical life and sensorial exercises. You will also find that the materials are arranged on the shelves in order of difficulty from left to right. By doing this, the children develop a pattern of setting up activities in this way, thus preparing for the left-to-right progression in reading. Just as important to reading is the ability to concentrate and stay focused on an activity. These skills are fostered throughout the classroom, particularly in the practical life area.

Before reading can begin, the child must develop the perceptual skills needed for the acquisition of reading. This is very much a cognitive process and cannot be rushed. In time, the child will notice the differences in the shapes of letters and will begin to show interest in the written word. The pace of this development is different for every child. We respect each child's personal timetable and know that to have a joyful reader, the child must not be rushed in the process of learning to read.

We use a phonetic approach to reading. Games are played in which the teacher says a word that begins with a phonetic sound, such as "cat," and the child can hear and repeat the beginning sound "c." The teacher will then begin to play the "I Spy" game; "I spy with my little eye something that begins with the sound "m;" can you tell me what it is?" At this point, hints may be given – "It is something on the snack table" (muffin). Again, this game is easily duplicated at home and is one your child will enjoy. (See below for the proper pronunciation of sounds). If you find your child is saying words and then repeating the first sound, or is asking to play word games, it is helpful to let your child's teacher know. Once the child can hear and recognize individual sounds, making the connection between the sound and the written symbol of each letter comes easily.

In a Montessori classroom, children learn the phonetic **sounds** of the letters before they learn the alphabetical names. The phonetic sounds are given first because these are the sounds they hear in words, and they are the sounds they need to be able to read. The children first become aware of the phonetic symbols when the teacher introduces the lower-case alphabet with lessons using the sandpaper letters. The sandpaper letters give the children the opportunity to use three senses in this learning process: visual (they see the form of the letter), auditory (they are given the phonetic sound), and kinesthetic (they are given the opportunity to "trace" the letters with their fingers). At this point, it is not important to introduce the upper-case alphabet. As children learn to read

and write, they will see and use more lower-case than upper-case letters. The phonetic sounds are reinforced through various materials in the classroom.

If you choose to work with your child at home, please remember to use lower-case letters only and to give the sound the letter makes rather than the name of the letter. This means that when you write something down for your child use only lower-case letters (with the exception of the first letter of a proper name.) Most importantly, you and your child should have fun in the process. Allow your child to take the lead and watch carefully for signs of fatigue, boredom and/or stress.

Phonetic Sounds for Letters of the Alphabet				
a – apple	g – goat	l – lamp	q – queen	v – valentine
b – bear	h – house	m – monkey	r – ring	w – wagon
c – cat	i – igloo	n – nest	s – sun	x – box
d – dog	j – jet	o – octopus	t – turtle	y – yo-yo
e – elephant	k – kite	p – pig	u – umbrella	z – zebra
f – fish				

As soon as the child has learned six to ten letter sounds, we introduce the moveable alphabet. This is a box containing several of each letter in the alphabet. The child is given a three-letter phonetic word and asked to identify the sounds and look for the corresponding letter. These letters are found and laid out on a mat. The child who has completed this activity is very excited; this is the first time communicating using "written" language. At this point, most children are unable to read the words that they have "written." One of the benefits of the moveable alphabet is that children can express themselves with "written" language prior to their ability to form the letters with pencil and paper. Children continue to use the moveable alphabet for years as they move from "writing" three letter words to longer words and eventually to phrases and sentences. It is important during this stage not to correct errors in spelling, punctuation, etc., as it will easily discourage the child from continuing to use the alphabet. Often children's first reading comes from realizing that they can actually read back the words written with the alphabet. This is a wonderful discovery and gives children a sense of having taught themselves to read. Writing, or the construction of words with the moveable letters, nearly always precedes reading in a Montessori environment.

Written Language

Beginning writing is an extremely important step in your child's language development. Montessori found long ago that the child, given the right preparation, would write (encode) before he reads (decodes). Recent studies now show that most early readers taught themselves to read by "writing."

In the Montessori classroom, written language using pencil and paper begins after much practice with the sandpaper letters, metal insets, and chalkboards. Around the time the child begins to use the moveable alphabet, s/he shows interest in writing the words down which s/he has sounded out with the alphabet. This is an important and exciting point in the Montessori language curriculum. It is a time during which the child's enthusiasm must be carefully protected. There are so many rules to learn in the English language that it is easy for the beginning writer to become discouraged.

It is helpful at this stage for parents to recall how the infant/toddler develops spoken language. If, in the beginning of learning to speak, the child is constantly corrected for every mispronounced word, s/he will become quickly discouraged in these efforts to communicate. The process of communicating through writing is much the same. Knowing s/he will not be corrected for mistakes will allow your child all the freedom needed to acquire these skills at his or her own pace. As the child is developing his writing skills, the teacher will make note of the errors the child is making consistently and will present the correct form in a lesson given to the child at a later time.

Helping Your Child with Writing at Home

On the following page is a chart that shows the proper formation of the letters using the cursive alphabet. Please see the next section for instructions on helping with the proper formation of the letters.

In the beginning, the child is concerned only with the lower-case alphabet. If your child shows interest at home, please use the lower-case letters only until the child has mastered them. With the exception of dotting the i and j and crossing the t and x, the pencil should stay on the paper. It is best to have your child start writing on a good-sized chalkboard, or by simply tracing letters in a shallow baking sheet with a layer of corn meal. Your child will need lots of practice writing. It is very important that it is done in a relaxed way, so that the joy in the process is maintained.

D'Nealian Cursive Alphabet

a b c d e f g h i j k
l m n o p q r s t u
v w x y z

A B C D E F G H I
J K L M N O P Q R
S T U V W X Y Z

D'Nealian Numbers

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Reading

The child has many developmental needs that must be met before one is ready to begin the reading process. Much of this takes place "behind the scenes." Just as we are unable to determine or control when a child will take a first step, we are unable to determine when a child will begin to read. What we can do is create a safe and stimulating environment, so that when the time is right, the child will be able to begin the process free of stress and/or fear of making mistakes.

Actual reading in the Montessori classroom begins with three-letter phonetic words. There is an abundance of phonetic reading material available, which allows the child repetition while acquiring new skills. As the child becomes comfortable with each step, a new challenge is added. There are "sight words" which can only be learned through memorization. In addition, the child learns the various digraphs (e.g. "sh"), blends (e.g. "cl"), etc., through the use of the moveable alphabet and other materials available in the classroom. As the child develops his ability to read, grammar and sentence structure are introduced. Most children will begin to read by using the many materials in the classroom, such as labels for classroom equipment and through the variety of botany, zoology, and geography materials. Some children will practice reading with primers available in the classroom, but most children will become strong readers without the use of the primers. (Many children find these stories very boring and the process tedious.) They would rather do their reading while studying the botany and zoology cards, reading songs and poems they have recited in class, deciphering charts on subjects that interest them, or reading recipes or science instruction cards. The possibilities are endless!

We cannot over-emphasize the importance of reading aloud to your child daily, even after your child has begun to read. This is truly the greatest gift you can give to your child in your desire to help him become a strong reader.

The language curriculum in a Montessori classroom is integrated into all areas of the classroom. The use of labels in the environment gives the child the opportunity to see written language even before he is consciously aware of it. Children are naturally interested in the areas of science, cultural studies, geography and music. In addition, every child has specific interests. We take advantage of these individual passions and interests and try to incorporate them into their personal reading and writing process.

Physical Geography

The children are introduced to geography with the concept of the globe. As with much of the Montessori curriculum, the "whole" is given first and then broken up into smaller pieces. The large wooden puzzle maps representing the world map and each continent are among the most popular activities in the classroom. At first the children use the maps simply as puzzles. Gradually they learn the names of many of the countries as they create their own maps. The children also learn the common land formations such as islands and lakes by manipulating landform trays and searching for these landforms on maps, in atlases, or in pictures. They may even create them in the sand box during outside time.

Cultural Awareness Program

Along with the study of physical geography and maps, the children gain an awareness of the cultures of the world by exploring the customs, food, music, dance, language, and animals of the continents they are studying. This helps to raise their consciousness about their global community and allows them to develop an appreciation for the similarities and differences of various world cultures. We invite parents and community members with an intimate knowledge of a particular culture to come and share their interest and love of a culture with the children.

Cooking and Nutrition

The children have food preparation activities available to them as a part of their practical life activities. In making our choices for cooking, we introduce the children to foods that are as close to the source as possible. For example, they may grind grain that will later be used to bake bread. This is a great opportunity to talk about where food comes from as well as to introduce the importance of good nutrition.

In studying various cultures, food from each culture is brought into the class for the children to sample. We are sometimes surprised at their willingness to sample new and different foods.

Art

In planning art activities in the primary environment, the teachers strive to maintain the great joy the child finds in the creative process. It is the process that is of primary importance at this time in their development. The children have the freedom to express their imaginations in a variety of mediums. The teacher presents the use of the medium to the children, and then the activity is placed on the shelf to be available for the

children to use until their interest has been saturated. Easel painting, drawing, pens, paper, glue, and scissors are always available to the children so that they may express themselves in many areas of the curriculum. This may be done by illustrating a story they have written, or by presenting a picture to the teacher who will write down a story narrated by the child. Projects will also be set up in relationship to the cultural studies (such as African block printing, Chinese brush painting, clay pots, etc.). In this way, art projects are integrated into all areas of the curriculum.

The children are introduced to several artists during their years in the Primary classroom. When an artist's work is presented to the children, the children will be given the opportunity to work in that artist's medium.

Creative Movement and Music

Children at MCS engage in music and creative movement every day. The musical element of primary appeal to young children is rhythm. The natural response to rhythm is physical; therefore, the body is the child's first instrument through which the movement in music is reflected and interpreted. Singing is a part of everyday as it is a natural opportunity for self-expression and provides an additional avenue for learning. Through singing, the children learn about melody, pitch, and rhythm. Children are exposed to music of various styles and from a variety of cultures.

Children are given the opportunity to begin auditory training with the Montessori Bells. Children begin by matching the bells with the same tone, moving on to building the scale, and eventually, for the older children, to composing their own music.

Music Program with our Specialist.

Each class has music once a week for about 30 minutes with our music specialist. Children are invited to sing, move, and play to music in each session. They use their bodies to move to the beat, add motions that mirror the words, or just use the space in the room to move freely. Scarves, balls, and musical instruments always get the children excited and ready for music. We love watching the growth of each student throughout a year of music with our specialist. The philosophy is for each student to have fun with music using the whole body. Hear the music, move to the music, feel the beat, smile with friends, and sing, too. Each classroom creates its musical experience together as a group, and the joy that is seen on each child's face is beautiful. The music program is offered in the Toddler classroom as well as our Primary classrooms.

Science and Nature

Children are born scientists. They are inquisitive and keen observers. The first lessons about the earth come from nature. The children's curiosity is stimulated through projects and experiments that allow them to discover the natural order of things. The plant and animal kingdoms are studied in an orderly fashion to build a sense of wonder and respect for nature. The observation and care of classroom pets develops in the children a sense of love and wonder for the animal kingdom. The physical sciences are introduced with simple experiments set up as activity choices in the classroom.

Children need concrete representation before they can move on to the abstract. With our beautiful woodland setting, hands-on nature studies are an integral part of our curriculum. Much of our indoor work with naming and classification is taken outdoors,

where the children are awakened to nature. It is our desire to bring about activities that allow the children to experience the world with all their senses. In this way appreciation and love of the natural environment is fostered and with it a sense of responsibility for all living things.

ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM

The Cultural Areas

In Montessori philosophy, the cultural subjects (anthropology, astronomy, biological sciences, chemistry, economics, geography, geology, government, history, philosophy, physics, political science, sociology, etc.) are not broken down into separate subject matters, but are treated as a totally integrated curriculum. The development of skills in mathematics, language, arts and crafts, physical education, music, foreign language, etc. is integrated with the cultural subjects. The biological studies are structured in such a way as to give the child a means of classification so he/she can structure and relate the facts of biology. The study reveals to the child that classification approximates evolution. The goal is an ecological view of life and a feeling of responsibility for the environment.

The study of history begins with the development of the solar system and life on earth. Creation stories from various cultures are presented. A time line of evolution is used as a beginning point for the botanical and zoological studies. The use of the time line gives the child a scientific representation of the length of time life was developing on earth prior to the arrival of the human species. Following the study of the evolution of non-human life on earth, the child focuses on the development of early civilizations (Egyptian, Roman, Native American, etc.) and vertical studies of how a specific need has been met through time (housing, writing, transportation, mathematics, etc.) Upper Elementary classes delve into the evolution of humans and the history of the United States.

The study of geography is designed to show how the physical configurations of the earth contribute to the history of mankind. The study of physical geography and geology is the basis for the study of economic geography and the interdependence of all people.

The first science experiments are designed to give the child the basic knowledge that will make possible the understanding of the development of the solar system, the earth and its configurations, life on earth, and the needs of plants and animals. Although each individual life on earth (both plant and animal) seems to be selfishly fighting for its own survival, each takes only what it needs and, in turn, makes its contributions to the ecological whole. (Montessori calls this its cosmic task.)

The human relations curriculum has The Fundamental Needs of Humans as its organizing center. These needs include the material or concrete needs (such as food, clothing, shelter,) and the spiritual or abstract needs (such as art, religion, and social acceptance.) By investigating these needs, the child comes to see that the needs of humans in all places on the earth and in all time in history are the same. This

understanding leads to the realization of the interrelatedness of all people. When the child can see that the needs of people are the same, then he/she can respect and appreciate the variety of ways in which those needs are met.

Research Skills

As the children explore the cultural areas, they discover a need for research skills. The teacher serves as a guide to a variety of resources including encyclopedias, atlases, dictionaries, thesauruses, almanacs, etc. The public library is also available for students doing projects requiring additional sources of information.

Language

Language is an important part of the entire Montessori curriculum. Its treatment as a separate subject comes only at the points at which it is necessary to give the student a conscious awareness of how it can be used more effectively. The cultural curriculum in the Montessori classroom guides the child through reading, both for its own enjoyment and as a research tool. The environment includes provisions for developing basic reading skills, introducing reading as a tool, fostering reading interest in appropriate literature, and encouraging life-long reading habits. Because children have different learning styles, they are provided with different means for learning to read within the environment. In this way, the child will be able to learn to read in the style that is the easiest and most meaningful for him/her.

Silent Reading (SR) is designed to foster habitual readers. SR is scheduled daily to provide students with the opportunity to read uninterrupted in the classroom. An SR book can be any book chosen by the student. The book can be brought from home or selected from the school library.

Mathematics

Manipulation of concrete and symbolic materials with built-in error control develops sound arithmetic skills and leads the child to make his/her own abstractions. The child continues to work with the material until he/she has internalized a concept. Then, the child begins work with memorization and speed of recall of facts and processes. Experience with material designed for the exploration of such concepts as long division, fractions, and decimals allow the child to work with such ideas at a young age. At every juncture, math is related to the cultural areas being explored, illustrating the practical use of mathematical concepts and their relevance to the child's world.

Geometry

Geometry in Montessori follows the historical development of the subject, which began as a concrete experience with abstractions following later (as with the Egyptian pyramids.) Each child follows the same sequence, first by exploring the concrete materials and later moving on to the abstract formulae and principles. Both plane and solid geometry, as well as areas and volume are explored through sensorial experience. The geometry nomenclature material provides the child vocabulary with which he/she can further classify the world.

Specialists

The Art program enables students to develop their skills and powers of perception, to understand, communicate, evaluate, and apply themselves to the serious task of

creating in a variety of art media. The program focuses on developing the ability to conceptualize and solve complex problems through the creative process, fostering self-expression and personal creativity, learning to care for, manage, and safely use materials and equipment, and developing an understanding of the historical and cultural contexts of art.

The Music program is based on the Orff pedagogy, which has been tailored to pair well with Montessori education. Each class has music once a week for one hour. Songs are generally taught by rote and then transferred to instruments. Xylophones, tubano drums, and other percussive instruments can be used to accompany a song. At the beginning of the year, the focus is on basic music theory and instrument technique. It doesn't take long for students to feel confident and ready to create music of their own that can serve as accompaniment or stand alone as its own piece. Each year we are inspired by the students and look forward to the musical journey we all take together.

Fitness

The fitness curriculum respects the body-mind connection. It responds to the children's physical needs and their love of movement. Cooperation and community are emphasized. The goals are to promote fitness, cultivate a positive attitude toward exercise and sports, and develop each child's confidence and self-esteem.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

ADMISSION/ENROLLMENT

Montessori Country School is open to children from infancy through 6th grade.

Nondiscriminatory Policy

Montessori Country School admits students of any race, color, or national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, gender, or national and ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, scholarship programs, or any other school-administered programs.

Primary Class Placement

Each year classes are configured based on the need for balance in the classes with regard to gender, age, and the ratio of new students to returning students. Our priority is to make decisions that keep the classes balanced and are in the best interest of the children. In this way, we can provide the very best possible school experience for your children. Every effort is made to keep the children with their familiar teachers for the duration of the time they are in a program.

Three Year Commitment

Montessori understood the cyclical development of young children and based her program on three-year cycles. The curriculum unfolds over the full three years. Materials used by the child in the first year may be used again in the following two years, deepening the experience with each interaction. The third and final year (Kindergarten, 3rd grade, or 6th grade in the public schools) is a powerful year during which the child synthesizes all that has been learned during the previous years. The third-year child takes on a leadership role, building a sense of confidence and self-esteem. It is our expectation that parents enrolling a child in our Primary and Elementary classes are committing to the full program.

Enrollment

To complete enrollment, each child will need the following on file:

- Completed and signed application form with required registration fee and tuition deposit (see Tuition Policy)
- Student Questionnaire Form (first year only)
- Immunization Record
- Parent Volunteer Form
- Student Information and Emergency Medical Consent Form
- Field Trip/Photograph/Over the Counter Preparation Permission Form

It is the responsibility of the parents to keep forms up-to-date. Please contact the office in writing with changes as they occur and update the information on SchoolCues. Please help us keep this important information current.

Re-enrollment

Re-enrollment for the following school year is done annually in February. Siblings of currently enrolled students will be given priority placement over new students if applying during the re-enrollment period.

Financial Aid

The Montessori Country School Board of Trustees is committed to having a strong financial aid program. They know this is an important way to reach out to our community, giving children whose families are not able to pay the full tuition an opportunity to attend our school. Each year, a portion of the fundraising and general operating budget is dedicated to financial aid. Parents seeking financial aid are asked to call the office to request a financial aid application at the time of application, re-enrollment, or if the need arises during the school year. Information shared during the application process will be kept strictly confidential – the names of those applying will only be known by the Head of School and Associate Head of School. Decisions regarding the allocation of financial aid funds are made with first consideration given to our current students. The following criteria is used in determining financial aid awards:

- Financial need as illustrated on application form
- Needs of child (emotional, educational, psychological)
- Commitment of family to Montessori philosophy and MCS
- Number of years child has attended MCS
- Number of children in the family attending MCS

MCS does not discriminate on the basis race, color, gender, national and/or ethnic origin in the determination of financial aid.

TUITION POLICY

Montessori Country School is a non-profit corporation, dependent upon tuition and fundraising to meet its operating costs. The Board of Trustees carefully reviews each year's budget before tuition is determined for the following year. The year's tuition is based on an annual cost per student. For your convenience, the annual tuition is divided into 10 monthly payments. Signature of the Enrollment Agreement Form constitutes an understanding and agreement of the MCS Tuition Policy.

Tuition Deposit

A **nonrefundable** tuition deposit equal to one month's tuition will confirm your commitment to enroll your child and is due on the date noted on the Enrollment Agreement Form you receive from MCS. This payment will be posted as your May payment for the school year in which you are enrolling your child.

Financial Aid Awards

If you have applied for financial aid, you will submit a \$250 deposit to hold your space until you receive your financial aid award. In the event that you choose not to accept the award and enroll your child, the \$250 deposit will be returned to you.

Payment Schedule

Tuition payments should reach the office by the fifth day of each month. For those enrolling prior to the beginning of the school year, after making the tuition deposit, the first tuition payment is due September 1st. Subsequent payments are due October through May. Your tuition deposit equal to one month's tuition will cover your June payment for the school year in which you are enrolling.

The school does not send out monthly bills; we send out a monthly email reminding parents that tuition is due on the first of each month. If your tuition payment has not reached the office by the 10th of the month, you will be notified, and a late fee of \$25 will be charged. If you have a financial concern and know your tuition will be late, please notify the office.

Payable During Absences

Tuition must be paid even if your child is absent from school, regardless of the reason for the absence (i.e., family trip, illness, or other obligations).

Additional Expenses

Throughout the year parents should anticipate small additional expenses. Field trips and class pictures are examples of the events and items in which additional costs may be passed on to parents. Costs in all cases will be kept to a minimum.

Elementary children in grades 3-6 will attend a 3-day outdoor education course in the spring. Families are responsible for the tuition fee and will be billed in April.

Elementary Supply Fee

An elementary supply fee covers the cost of classroom supplies and extra transportation costs. It is included in the tuition amount.

Withdrawal From School/Tuition Liability

Written notification must be sent to the office if you plan to withdraw your child prior to the beginning of the school year for which an Enrollment Agreement was signed, or during that school year. Parents withdrawing prior to the beginning of the school year, or during the school year, will be obligated to the following tuition liability:

Withdrawal Liability

By May 31: Deposit forfeited + one month of tuition is due

After May 31: Deposit forfeited + two months of tuition is due

Termination of Enrollment by MCS

Every effort will be made to help parents and children resolve any difficulties that may arise with their child's experience at MCS. If a problem arises for which no positive solution can be found, or if the staff feel they cannot meet the needs of the child or family, parents will be asked to withdraw their child from the school. In this case your tuition deposit will be refunded.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

Arrival and dismissal times can be challenging at MCS. Following the procedures below will help to assure the safety of your children. Each year, we will send home information stating the time we would like the children in each class to arrive and depart as well as important information regarding driveway safety. It is the parents' responsibility to be sure designated drivers understand the procedures and policies regarding arrival and dismissal.

The Importance of Being on Time

To give your child the opportunity to make a smooth adjustment to school each day, it is important for him or her to arrive at school on time. We cannot over-emphasize how important this is. The beginning of class is an important time for your child to orient himself to the day ahead. It is a time when the teacher greets each student and a time when the entire class may gather for a beginning group. During this time, a teacher may be giving important lessons, making announcements, and/or presenting grace and courtesy lessons that are an integral part of the classroom culture. As adults, we have all had the experience of arriving at a meeting late and feeling the embarrassment of disrupting the group and the disorientation in not knowing what has been covered.

If a child is late on a regular basis, parents may be asked to come in to meet with their child's teacher. A plan for improving the situation will be developed at that time. In the event of chronic lateness, the Head of School will call to set up a meeting to discuss the matter with the parent.

Messages for your Child's Teacher

Please put all messages for your child's teacher in writing. We recommend keeping a pad of paper and pencil in your car. With their focus on greeting each child and being sure they settle in for the day, it is very difficult for the staff to remember verbal messages given at arrival time. You can also leave messages by email or calling the office.

Late Arrivals

Primary children arriving late must be accompanied into the classroom by the parent or designated driver. The child must be brought to the attention of the teacher or assistant before the parent leaves.

Elementary children arriving late are asked to check-in at the office prior to entering the classroom.

Late Pick-Up

The dismissal times give a fifteen-minute window during which your child should be picked up. The end of the day is the time for the staff to clean up, plan, and prepare for the next morning. If you have a one-time and unforeseen need to be late, please call the office and we will designate an adult to stay with your child. If a family has a pattern of being late for pick-up, a conversation will be held with the Head of School to address the concern and create a plan with the parents.

Carpools

Forming carpools as early as possible is highly recommended. If you have problems with transportation, contact the office, and we may have some suggestions. Those in

carpools are asked to write down the carpool schedule with the name and phone number of the driver who is assigned to pick up the children each day. Please give this to the office, and we will make copies for your child's teacher.

Car Seats

State law requires that children younger than 8 years old or under 4'9" in height be restrained in an approved child safety seat. Children should not be seated in the front seat if there is an activated air bag.

If you are leaving your child's car seat at school, please be sure it is clearly labeled.

Although MCS staff may assist in putting children into their car seats, the driver of the car is fully responsible for the proper use of safety restraints.

Release of your Child to Others

If a child is to be picked up by anyone other than a parent or a regular carpool driver, please give the office a written, signed, and dated note indicating who will pick your child up, and the date and time that this is to be in effect. If you regularly have someone other than the parent pick up your child, this message can be emailed and will be placed in your child's file. Your child's well-being is our primary concern. Calling the office with this information should only be used in emergencies.

If we are unable to contact you, and your child has not been picked up within 15 minutes of dismissal time or has become ill at school, we will contact a driver in your carpool or a person listed on the Student Information Emergency Form (SIEF), which you fill out at the beginning of each year. Please let us know in writing if names or phone numbers on your SIEF change during the year.

*Please note special dismissal policies regarding emergency closures are written under "Early Dismissal and/or School Closures."

Elementary Arrival and Dismissal

Arrival time is between 8:00 and 8:15. Class begins at 8:15. Pick-up time is between 3:00 and 3:15. There is no before or after school care available.

All Lower Elementary students should remain in their cars in the morning until the staff "greeter" opens the car door, or in the case of an automatic door, the car should be squarely in front of the greeter, in front of the concrete pad, before students hop out. **All children must exit on the passenger side of the car.** Upper Elementary students may open their own car doors and exit their car **IF** the car is in the drop-off zone. If a family has an Upper Elementary student and younger siblings, the Upper Elementary student may open the car door, get out, hold the door for the sibling and then close the door. In the afternoons during pick-up, the Upper Elementary students can open their own car door. If they have a younger sibling, we ask the Upper Elementary to hold the door open for their sibling, then get in the car and close the door. Everyone should say good morning and goodbye. Thank you for supporting Grace and Courtesy!

Children's House Traffic/Driveway Safety Procedures

- If, for any reason, traffic is backed up onto Arrow Point Drive, we ask that you drive over to Battle Point Park. You can park there in the parking lot and wait until the driveway situation calms down, or you can walk over to the school to pick up or drop off your child. At the request of BI Parks management, we ask that you not queue up at the park to come back over the school. Please park in the lot and wait until the congestion in our driveway subsides. If you choose to walk over, please use the walking trail north of our entrance driveway. At the request of the City of Bainbridge, we are not allowed to park on or hold up traffic on Arrow Point Drive. Cars waiting on the road block visibility for cars exiting the driveway and force cars that need to get by into the other lane. If you cannot pull fully into the driveway, please do not turn into the driveway. Adhering to these guidelines is critical in allowing us to keep our Conditional Use Permit (necessary to operate a business on residentially zoned property.)
- Primary parents, please stay in your car while in the car line.
- Watch staff for directions on moving into the load/unload area.
- Children must stay in their car seats until the car is stopped in the load/unload area.
- Please turn off your car engine when your car is in the load/unload area.
- Please do not talk on your cell phone while in the load/unload area.
- Once your child is unloaded, you may pull out and exit the driveway.

Parent & Infant and Toddler Arrival and Dismissal

Parents of Infants and Toddlers are asked to accompany their children in and out of the classroom each day by walking around the north side of the building to the playground gate. Please hold your child's hand when you are in the parking lot and crossing the driveway. Those parents who are staying in the parent conference room should bring their children to the playground entrance and exit the same way, entering the school again at the front entrance of the school. (This will alleviate the possibility of a child trying to go upstairs to look for a parent.) For safety reasons and for your child's well-being, it is very important that your child be picked up at 11:00 so that you can be out of the parking lot by 11:10 when traffic begins to gather for the Primary class dismissal.

Primary Arrival and Dismissal

During arrival and dismissal times, the staff will help the Primary class children to and from their cars. With limited parking, this is the best solution to a smooth and safe beginning and ending to your child's day. Please have patience with this process, and expect that there will be times that you will be waiting in line. If you find this too frustrating, we suggest that you park at Battle Point Park and walk our trail over to school.

If you are first in line, pull all the way up to the north end of the drop-off zone. If, for any reason, you feel there may be a delay in getting your child out of the car, please park and accompany your child to the front gate where a staff member will greet him/her.

If you arrive late, please accompany your child into the classroom and bring his/her arrival to the attention of the assistant or teacher.

UNEXPECTED SCHOOL CLOSURES AND EARLY DISMISSAL

Occasionally it is necessary to close school or dismiss students early due to inclement weather, a power outage, or other emergency.

Snow Policy

Generally MCS will follow Bainbridge Island School closures as announced on most major radio and TV stations with the following considerations:

- If Bainbridge schools are closed, MCS will be closed.
- If Bainbridge schools are running 1 hour late, Children's House morning classes will begin at 9:15, Elementary classes will begin at 9:00.
- If Bainbridge schools are running 2 hours late, MCS will start 1.5 hours late and will hold all classes. Arrival times: Elementary 9:30-9:45, Primary 9:40-9:55, Toddler 10:00. Dismissal will be at the regular time.

With many of our faculty living off-island, a part of our decision to hold classes will be based on their ability to get to the school.

In the event we make a decision other than the above we will make every effort to notify parents by phone. Please be sure to advise your child's room rep and the school office if your phone number has changed.

If snow begins during class time and conditions are expected to deteriorate, parents will be called and asked to pick up their children early. If you are not by your phone and it begins to snow, please call the school or come early in case of early dismissal.

Release of Children in Case of Early Dismissal

If it is necessary to close school early, parents will be called to pick up their children. Children will be released to the parent, their regular carpool driver, or another person designated by the parent unless specific instructions have been given at the time we contact the parent by phone. If a child is not picked up in a reasonable amount of time and neither parents nor carpool drivers can be reached, MCS staff will try to contact those authorized to pick up the child on the Student Information and Emergency Form.

In the unusual event we cannot make contact with any of those designated by the parents, and we are unable to be in contact with a parent, an MCS staff member may stay at the school with the child, or in an extreme case, take the child to his/her home. In this extreme case, if we are unable to contact you, a note indicating where your child is will be left at the front of the school.

EMERGENCY PLAN

MCS has developed emergency plans to protect the children and staff in the event of a range of emergency and disaster situations, including earthquakes and armed intruders. The school is prepared with first aid, food, and other emergency supplies to

accommodate the staff and children for up to 72 hours if necessary. If the building is deemed unsafe, we will find shelter at Battle Point Park or another school-designated shelter.

Each child must have on file with MCS an information sheet titled “Student Information and Emergency Form” (SIEF) Please inform us in writing of any changes to information on this form.

STUDENT RELEASE IN EVENT OF MAJOR DISASTER

After a major disaster, release of children may be advised by BI Police, Fire Department, or by the Administration of MCS. Students must be picked up and signed out by a person designated by the parent on their child’s SIEF. The children will be released to the first person who arrives who is listed on the child’s SIEF or who is a regular carpool driver. We will not wait to see if the parent is able to make it to the school. **Therefore, it is critical that parents make a rendezvous plan with those they have listed as authorized to pick up their child on the SIEF.**

Parent Procedure for Pick-Up

- Park at Battle Point Park for pick-up.
- Look for sign designating “Release Station.”
- If you are picking up your child only or any children other than your own, go to the release station. The children you are authorized to take and your own child will be brought to you, and you must sign them out before they will be released.
- EVERY CHILD MUST BE SIGNED OUT. This is the only way we will have a record stating to whom each child was released.

Children who have not been picked up by dusk will stay at school or at a school-designated alternative shelter with a school staff member. Information as to the location of the shelter(s) will be posted at the school on the reader board or front porch.

If phones are working, we may be able to leave a message on the school phone, or you may try calling Meghan Skotheim 206-719-7459 (cell) or Karla Piecuch 206-313-3584 (cell).

Volunteers: Help will be needed in the event of a disaster. Please check in at the release station if you are able to stay and help.

KIRO 710 AM is the designated station for Kitsap County Emergency information. If possible, information will be left with KIRO.

ARMED INTRUDER AND UNSAFE CAMPUS PLAN

In the event of an armed intruder or other unsafe campus incident, the school will go into lock-down. Doors will be locked and students and staff will be sequestered away from windows and out of view. We will not release from lock-down until notified by Bainbridge Police. Bainbridge Police request that you NOT attempt to enter the campus during the incident. We will notify you when it is safe to pick-up your child.

In the event that another island school experiences a similar incident, we will receive notification from BIPD and will determine whether we enter into our own lock-down, institute sheltering in place, or continue as usual. Dismissal during a sheltering in place incident will be a modified dismissal where all children and staff stay indoors and children are escorted individually to cars as they arrive.

CLASSROOM INFORMATION

BIRTHDAYS

In preparation for your child's birthday celebration, you will be asked for photographs of each year of your child's life to be placed in your child's birthday book. The book will stay at school for the duration of your child's time at MCS and a new photo will be added each year. On the day of the in-class celebration, please be prepared to say a little something about the day of birth and each year of your child's life.

Please schedule your child's birthday celebration with your child's teacher.

A "Birthday" Gift to the Classroom

If you choose, your child may bring a small gift for his/her classroom. Some ideas from the past: a beautiful flower, shell, or other treasure from nature; a pretty basket, tray, or vase that can become a part of the classroom; a beautiful container or piece of fabric from another country; a favorite CD or book; or a financial donation in honor of your child. Teachers always have a wish-list of items they would love to have for their classrooms, so feel free to ask if you would like an idea of a gift. Please do not feel pressured to do this. It is entirely optional and is meant to be a fun way for your child to feel the joy of giving during this special time.

Summer Birthdays

If your child has a summer birthday, please check with your child's teacher for how s/he plans to celebrate with the children who are not in school at the time of their birthdays.

CLOTHING CHILDREN'S HOUSE

This is the age when children are striving for independence and need to be free to actively work and play. We ask that you support the following regarding school attire:

1. **Independence:** All clothing should be easy for the children to handle by themselves, including fastenings. Elastic-waist pants that can easily be pulled up work well.
2. **Worry Free:** Much of the activity at school takes place on the floor. Art activities and outdoor activities can be messy. Please dress your children in clothes that are not restrictive and are sturdy and washable. We want the children to feel free in the process of their work and play without worry about soiling their clothes.

3. **Loops for Hanging:** Please sew loops on the inside collars of all coats, sweatshirts, and sweaters that may be hung up at school. This will give your child an opportunity for success in hanging clothing on the hooks and will help in developing independence and self-confidence. Ribbon or seam binding sewn into the inside collar work great, and you can use a fabric marker to label right on the loop!
4. **Labeled:** Please have all clothing and footwear that might be removed marked clearly with your child's name. Labeling all clothing sent to school ensures that it will be returned to you if left at school. Unlabeled clothes will be donated to Helpline House at the end of each term. (December, April, and June)
5. **Weatherproof:** Please dress children appropriate for the weather. Except for exceptionally stormy days, the children will spend time outdoors every day.
6. **Footwear:** Children should wear rubber-soled **shoes that fit securely and that they are able to put on and take off by themselves.** Please no party shoes, clogs, plastic or loose fitting shoes. They are just not safe while running on the playground. Slippers or indoor shoes for class-time should be simple, rubber-soled, and easy for the child to put on and take off (please no overstuffed or slippers with chunky animal heads, bells etc.)
7. **Reality based:** In keeping with the Montessori philosophy, which focuses on the real world and the true personality of the child, we ask that children not wear costumes to school.

ELEMENTARY

Children should be dressed comfortably to allow for movement activities and floorwork. We will go outside daily unless the weather is severe; therefore, outerwear should be appropriate for weather conditions. Hats are allowed outside the building only. Active play during recess is encouraged and appropriate footwear for climbing and running is expected. Each child will need a pair of inside shoes for classroom use. In addition, children will need a pair of appropriate shoes for Fitness if their regular shoes are not appropriate. A change of clothes is useful and may be stored in the student locker.

DISCIPLINE AND BEHAVIOR POLICIES

Self-Discipline

It is our goal to help the children develop self-discipline. Most potential discipline problems are alleviated through careful planning. Children are encouraged to resolve conflicts with each other, but the adult is always nearby to give direction and facilitate a peaceful resolution when needed. For the Toddler, distraction is used to take a child's attention from a disruptive activity to one that is more productive.

Responsibility

Children are taught to take responsibility for their actions. If a child does not respond to the teacher's efforts to bring about cooperative behavior, the child may be asked to sit by herself within the classroom, or on the playground if a problem occurs during outside-time. This is a time for the child to calm down and to bring about self-control. We encourage children to observe their classmates during this time with a focus on the behavior we wish to promote. If the disruptive behavior continues during this sitting-aside time, the teacher may bring a student to the office to sit with the Administrative staff.

Conflict Resolution

The Children's House and Elementary children are encouraged to problem-solve and are taught conflict resolution skills early on. If needed, the adults in the class act as mediators for the children in conflict. Each child is asked to state his or her side of the story. The children are encouraged to use "I" statements and "feeling" statements and are asked to listen as each speaks. They can be prompted if it is helpful:

"When you _____, I felt _____."

Next time I would like you to _____."

The adults clarify the situation if necessary and then ask each child for suggestions of how they feel the problem could be solved. The goal is to come up with a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved.

The conflict resolution process may happen quite spontaneously and casually; at other times it will take time to get to a resolution. Occasionally, the teacher may incorporate the use of a "peace rose" or "peace area." This is a ritual object or place that helps bring meaning to the commitment to solve the conflict in a peaceful way. As the children move into their kindergarten or elementary years, they may choose to use these rituals on their own without adult intervention.

Occasionally, no solution can be reached, and the teacher may have the children work apart from each other for a little while and encourage them to try to problem-solve later. This can give them the space they need to cool down.

Above all, the adults are compassionate and consistent. Talking quietly and reminding the children of the steps they can take to get to a resolution is empowering to the children. Often, clarifying the ground rules, offering choices, or setting a reasonable limit to behavior can solve the problem. Children are the happiest when they are doing something at which they can succeed. To insure success, the teachers become keen observers of each child. These observations are used in preparing the environment to alleviate areas of conflict. The developmentally appropriate and beautifully prepared Montessori classroom creates an atmosphere in which children seldom have difficulties with discipline.

Encouragement and Praise

We want to instill in the children a sense of ownership and responsibility for their choices. In the same fashion as self-discipline, the goal is for the child's drive to be internal and not dependent on outside praise. To this end, the staff is careful with the words they use in talking with the children about the work they have done or the choices they are making. Rather than praising the children, we try to engage them by using words that allow them to begin to self-reflect. A simple observation, such as "I see you drew a picture" or "I appreciate the time you dedicated to your work," and statements and questions regarding the child's work, such as "Tell me something about your drawing" or "I'm interested in the way you chose to organized your report – what gave you that idea?" help to instill a sense of ownership of his/her work. Instead of saying "I'm proud of you," a teacher might say – "You look like you are feeling proud about the

work you have done.” or “How do you feel about the job you just completed?” When adults constantly praise a child, the child begins making choices based on his/her desire to please the adult and receive the praise rather than an internal desire for the process of the activity. The difference between praise and encouragement is very subtle. A question to ask oneself in speaking with a child is “Are my words in some way judging (for good or bad) or are they helping the child to look at his own feelings about the choices or the work he has done?”

Behavior Policy

Our goal is that the entire school functions as a community with each student respectful of her own needs and the rights and needs of others. We monitor behavior while being aware of each student’s individual needs and current stage of development. The children are taught socially appropriate behavior, self-control, and respect for others.

If a negative behavior occurs at school, it is most effective if we can handle the consequences here at school. It is important that the parents and the school staff work together, but the consequences and problem solving need to be immediately tied to the behavior. Our policy is as follows:

- Abuse of a material may lead to loss of the privilege of using that material;
- Deliberately hurting another child or disrupting the class may lead to being away from the group until the child is calm enough to rejoin the activity (the child is never left unattended);
- Every effort is made to help a child who exhibits challenging behavior resolve the behavioral problem. Parents will be contacted if a problem persists and will be asked to work with the staff toward a solution. Habitual behavior by a child that compromises the safety of the children or the atmosphere of the classroom may lead to termination of enrollment.
- Biting is most apt to happen with children who are pre-verbal and unable to express their needs with words. In the event of a biting incident, the teacher will talk with the parent of the child who bit and the parent of the child who was bitten to discuss the problem. If biting is a persistent problem, it may be necessary to terminate the child’s enrollment.

Discipline Policy

MCS strictly forbids corporal punishment or the use of any verbal or physical abuse whatsoever. In addition, food or liquid will not be denied to a child as a means of discipline. A natural consequence to a behavior is sought whenever possible, which allows the children to develop personal responsibility for their choices.

Child Abuse Reporting

By law, Montessori Country School is required to report to Child Protective Services any suspicious occurrences of physical, sexual, or emotional child abuse, neglect or child exploitation.

FIELD TRIPS AND EXCURSIONS

ELEMENTARY FIELD TRIPS AND “GOING OUT”

On occasion, the elementary teachers will schedule all-school or classroom specific field trips. Parents will be notified of the trips in advance. There may be a small fee for transportation and/or admission. A signed permission slip will be kept on file in the office.

“Going Out” is an important element of the Montessori curriculum. Going Out occurs for a single child or group of children when exploration of a topic exhausts the resources of the classroom. It is a planned undertaking by a small group of children or a child. They find a resource in the community, schedule the outing, arrange for their own transportation and supervision (by staff or parent volunteers), prepare themselves for the experience, conduct themselves with dignity while out in public, and return to share their research with the rest of the class. Each Going Out is an entire course of study on independence, responsibility, and good citizenship —to say nothing of the intellectual rewards that children get from such experience.

Elementary Outdoor Education

In the spring, the Upper Elementary and 3rd years participate in a three-day outdoor education program. Parents are responsible for the cost of the program and will be billed separately. Further information will be provided at an information meeting in the spring.

Field Trips for Primary Classes

Our basic philosophy about field trips is that most preschool-aged children do better on outings with their own parents or in a very small group. Rather than planning field trips, we are more apt to inform parents of events or experiences that are available in the community – especially as they relate to areas we might be studying in the classroom. Although it is rare for us to plan a field trip, on occasion an opportunity may come up that seems appropriate for a larger group. Parents will be informed of upcoming field trips in the monthly newsletter or by special notice. On field trip days, parents may be asked to arrange transportation for their child to and from the field trip site. For field trips off school grounds a ratio of adults to children will be one to six. Parents will be asked to help with field trips.

Excursions for Primary Classes

Teachers may walk the Primary children to Battle Point Park to see the ducks or play on the equipment from time to time. The release form signed by you and kept in your child’s file will suffice as permission for your child to go to the park with her teachers.

Each spring we take our Children’s House graduates on a hike to a local beach near Battle Point Park.

Field Trips and Excursions for the Toddler Class

The toddler class does not take field trips or excursions off-campus unless accompanied by the parents.

SCHOOL SNACKS AND LUNCH

Elementary Lunch

Lunch begins with the preparation of the environment by the care team. Tablecloths and plates are placed on tables in both classrooms, and students choose seats by setting a name card and unpacking lunches. Students are divided into groups that change every two weeks, giving everyone an opportunity to share a meal with a variety of school friends. When everyone is seated, a student reads a poem and lights a candle to signify the beginning of the meal. Each table is responsible for clean-up and a rotating team is responsible for taking the dishes to the dishwasher and putting any soiled tablecloths in the wash. When weather permits, the Elementary students will eat lunch outside at the picnic tables.

Children's House Lunch

The lunch program at MCS is a special time when the children share time with each other and with MCS staff members. The children are proud to prepare their places for lunch. Name cards may be placed to be sure that children are seated with a variety of students. When all is ready, the lunch staff sits down with the children, and a song is sung before the children begin eating. This is a perfect opportunity for what Dr. Montessori spoke of as "lessons in grace and courtesy." The lunch staff takes this time to engage the children in conversation. The children learn to take turns in sharing their interests, thoughts, and experiences with their classmates. In addition, it is a great opportunity to talk about nutrition and the needs and care of their bodies. Often a chapter book is read aloud to the children, stimulating great discussion. Lunchtime is not something separate from the rest of their day at MCS, but rather another opportunity for learning and socializing.

Lunch Guidelines

Wholesome, simple lunches allow for great conversation about where our food comes from and how it got into our lunches (beyond your loving hands!) This may lead to a discussion of how far our food has traveled, how plants grow, and what part of the plant we are eating, and the difference between a grain and a protein.

As your child gains independence, we'd encourage you to invite him or her to participate in preparing and/or packing his/her lunch. By giving a few choices of foods in a variety of food groups (protein, grains, fruits, vegetables) and providing containers and supplies for making lunch, children often take great pleasure in this routine.

Please send foods that do not need heating. A thermos can be used for warm foods, and the use of a small ice pack in an insulated lunch box is encouraged to keep other foods cool.

School will provide filtered water, placemats, cups, and silverware for the children. We encourage reusable containers. Children will be unpacking their own lunches. To allow for their independence, please be sure your child is able to open and close the containers that are used. (This would be good to practice at home with an empty container.)

We will have your child bring home all uneaten food so you can judge how much he actually eats.

Food Allergies

If your child has food allergies, please talk with your child's teacher to make arrangements for lunch, snack, and other times your child may be served food at school.

CHILDREN'S HOUSE:

Because of the severity of nut allergies (including peanuts), and the age of the children, MCS Children's House is NUT-FREE. Please do not send any foods to school that contain nuts or nut oils.

ELEMENTARY:

Food allergies are handled on a case by case basis.

Snacks

Children will have snack available to them during the time they are at school. Parents are assigned "snack weeks" during which time they provide snack for their child's class. A notice will be sent to you along with some snack suggestions that the children have enjoyed in the past. A well-nourished child is more apt to be alert and ready to learn. These early years of life are the years in which your child develops his lifetime eating habits.

SCHOOL CALENDAR

School Closures and Holidays

A calendar of planned school closures and holidays is sent to parents at the beginning of each school year. Any changes from the published calendar will be communicated in the newsletter, on the parent page of the web site, and by email or by phone.

Staff In-Service Days

School is closed for Staff In-Service days throughout the school year – on the average once a month October-May. Because the emphasis in the Montessori Curriculum is preparation of the environment, it is critical that teachers have time to plan and make changes in the classrooms on a regular basis. When your child returns to school after an In-Service day, she will find available exciting new activities and materials.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Conferences are scheduled three times a year – in the fall, winter, and spring. Dates are announced in the calendar distributed at the beginning of the year. Conferences are opportunities for collaboration and information sharing regarding your child. For the Children's House, this is an adult-only time; please arrange for childcare. Some parents have found it helpful to schedule conferences back to back so they can watch each other's children. For the Elementary program, students are invited to participate in the April conference. It is important that you are available on conference days as scheduling a make-up conference is difficult and time-consuming for the staff. Phone conferences can be set up on the conference days if necessary.

Parent Meetings and Other School Functions

Dates for parent meetings and other school functions are announced in our monthly Newsletter, in the Friday Notes, and on the parent portal page of the website. We ask

that you try to attend these events. Parent education meetings focus on child development, parenting, and the Montessori philosophy and curriculum. We want our parent education evenings to be meaningful to you and invite your ideas on topics you would like to see covered.

Curriculum Evenings

Twice per year, the Elementary children will invite their families to a Curriculum Evening during which each child will present an area of study or interest. Set up in a round-robin style, parents are encouraged to visit many presentations in both classrooms as time allows.

Materials Night

The Primary and Elementary children will invite a parent or other special adult into the classroom for lessons on their favorite materials. Visits are scheduled for 20 minutes and offer a peek into a day in the life of your child.

Primary Class Teas for Two

The children prepare songs, a snack and a gift for a parent or other adult guest on this very special day.

Children's House Parent/Child Event

Parents are the special guests for this event. Each year this event takes on a new twist. Details will be announced in the newsletter.

Children's House Graduation

Parents and siblings of our 5-year-old students who are graduating are invited to attend a special graduation ceremony. This is a beautiful celebration of their completion of the Montessori Primary program.

Moving-Up Ceremony

During the last week of school, the Elementary students will present a Moving Up Ceremony to commemorate the year and welcome new children to the elementary program. It usually includes songs and a ceremony for those children graduating from the program.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Parents will be asked to fill out a Student Information and Emergency Form (SIEF) each year. Please be sure to notify the school in writing of any changes in emergency and/or medical information or phone numbers that occur during the school year.

CHILD AND STAFF ILLNESS EXEMPTION

Children and staff are asked to stay home if they are ill. To help us maintain a healthy environment at school, no one will be allowed at school when any of the following symptoms are present or have been present within the past 24 hours:

- Fever of 100 degrees F underarm or higher or one or more of the following: earache, headache, sore throat, rash, signs of confusion or irritability and/or fatigue that prevent participation in regular activities.
- Rash (unless diagnosed as non-contagious).
- Persistent cough — until it has been checked by a physician and considered non-contagious.
- Active cold (discharge of heavy, discolored, or profuse amounts of mucous.)
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Open or oozing sores, unless properly covered with cloths or with bandages
- Suspected communicable skin infections such as impetigo, pinkeye, and scabies: The child may return after medical diagnosis to rule out bacterial or viral infection, or 24 hours after starting antibiotic treatment.
- Lice (or nits) or scabies until they have been treated.
- Unusual fatigue or irritability, “not feeling well,” paleness, confusion, lack of appetite.

If MCS staff observe signs of illness or symptoms as stated above, you will be contacted and asked to pick up your child. If we are unable to contact you, we may contact those listed on your child’s SIEF.

An Illness and Accident Report will be filed for all children who become ill at school. We will make every effort to send a copy home with your child. A verbal report will be given to the person picking up the child if the teacher has not had the opportunity to fill out the report in writing.

Weather permitting, an outside time is a regular part of the daily schedule. All children well enough to be at school are considered well enough to play outside. We are unable to supervise children inside during outside playtime.

MINOR ACCIDENTS

Minor accidents during school hours will receive the prompt attention of the school staff using information attained during first-aid training (required of all staff.) A Student Injury Report will be written up, and every effort will be made to send a copy home with the child. With a minor injury occurring at the end of the day, a teacher may verbally inform the parent or carpool driver of the incident if there has not been time to fill out a report before the child is dismissed. (Often these mishaps occur on the playground just before going home.)

MEDICAL EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Non Life-Threatening Emergencies

- Staff member trained in first aid will take the appropriate steps.
- Every effort will be made to report the incident to the parent within an hour.
- If neither parent can be reached, and if it is determined necessary by the staff that a child should be dismissed before the regular dismissal time, staff will try to contact the emergency contacts listed on the Student Information and Emergency Form. If

no one can be reached, and MCS staff feels the event is serious enough to warrant a medical opinion, the child's physician may be called and, if requested by the doctor, the child will be taken to the doctor's office by an MCS staff member. The staff member will use the MCS car seat to transport the child and will remain with the child until the parent or a person designated by the parent arrives. The Student Information and Emergency Form will be taken to the doctor's office with the child.

- An injury report will be entered in the "Illness and Injury Reports" notebook. Every effort will be made to send a copy home with the child. First priority will be given to attend to the child. Therefore, a copy of the report may be sent home later. A copy of the report will also be brought to the attention of the Head of School or Associate Head of School.

Life-Threatening Emergencies

- Staff member trained in first aid will take the appropriate steps to attend to the child.
- A second staff member will contact 911 for emergency services and stand by.
- Office staff will make every effort to contact either parent.
- If parents cannot be reached, an effort will be made to contact those listed on the Student Information and Emergency Form.
- Child's medical records must accompany the child to the clinic or hospital.
- Child will be transferred to Virginia Mason Clinic, Harrison Hospital or other hospital as directed by the doctor or parent or at the discretion of the emergency medical team.
- An MCS staff member will accompany the child if the child's parent is not available and the emergency medical teams give permission for him/her to ride in the ambulance with the child. If not allowed in the emergency vehicle an MCS staff member will follow the child to the clinic or hospital and stay with him/her until a parent or other parent-designated person arrives.
- Staff will enter a report into the "Illness and Injury Reports" notebook, a copy will be given to the parents, and a copy brought to the attention of the Head of School or Associate Head of School.

ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICATION

Medical/Treatment Authorization Forms

Parents must give written consent before we can give any medication (prescription or non-prescription) to a child. A Medication/Authorization form, available from your child's teacher or the office, must be filled out completely and signed by the parent. The information on the form includes:

- Child's first and last name
- Name of medication
- Reason for giving the medication
- Amount of medication to give
- Start and stop dates
- How to store the medication

All medications must be delivered directly to the office in a tamper-proof original container. It will be stored according to directions and kept out of the reach of

the children. If the child's medications need to be in two locations (e.g. home and at school), the pharmacist can divide the prescription into two containers.

Duration of Consent

- For chronic conditions (such as asthma), allergies, or for external medication such as diaper ointments or sunscreen, the written authorization may cover an extended period of time of up to one year.
- Written authorization for other medications must have a "start" and "stop" date, and will only be given for the number of days stated on the medication bottle for prescriptions.

Prescription Medications

Prescription medications must be in the original container from the pharmacy labeled with the child's full name, name of the medication, dosage, frequency, and duration.

"As needed" medications may be given only when the health care provider specifies a list of specific symptoms on the authorization form.

Non-Prescription Drugs and Medications:

The following non-prescription drugs and medications will be administered only after the parent has filled out and signed a Medication/Treatment Authorization Form and only if the bottle label tells how much medication is to be given based on the child's age and weight:

- Antihistamines
- Non-aspirin fever reducers/pain relievers
- Non-narcotic cough suppressants
- Decongestants
- Ointments or lotions intended to reduce or stop itching

If the parent directs the school to administer any of the above medications (prescription or non-prescription) in a dose or a way that is not consistent with the label, a Medication/Treatment Authorization Form must be signed by a health care provider with prescriptive authority.

Non-prescription internal medications (over the counter drugs) will not be given to children under 2 years of age without a signed physician's order.

HEALTH RECORDS

The school will keep on file the following health records for each child: Immunization Form, date of last physical exam, and the Student Information and Emergency Form. Parents are asked to provide in writing a list of their child's allergies. These will be included in the medical records.

IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

State law requires submission of a Certificate of Immunization before the first day of a child's attendance in school. We advise you to contact your physician for the latest requirements to be sure your child's immunizations are up to date. If there are medical, personal or religious reasons why your child is not immunized, you must indicate this on the immunization form and Certificate of Exemption form signed by a doctor or other health care provider. MCS follows the state requirements for all immunizations

Policy for Children Not Immunized

If a child has been exposed to a communicable disease, we will be in close contact with the Kitsap County Health Department. For children who have not been immunized, the following steps may be taken:

1. If any child at MCS comes down with a communicable childhood disease for which an immunization is available, all children not immunized who may have been in contact with that child will be asked not to attend school until the incubation period or outbreak is over. There will not be a tuition adjustment under these circumstances.
2. If a child who is not immunized has knowingly been exposed to a childhood disease from someone outside the MCS community, and it is a disease for which an immunization is available, the child will be asked to stay out of school until the incubation period ends. There will not be a tuition adjustment under these circumstances.

NOTIFICATION OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

Please call the school office if your child or a sibling has contracted a communicable childhood disease. This will allow us to inform other parents and hopefully alleviate the spread of the disease. The notification from MCS will be by email. It will include the signs and symptoms, the date of exposure, the classroom in which the initial exposure may have taken place, the method of transmission, and the incubation and communicability periods. We will be in contact with the Kitsap County Health Department for recommendations of steps that we can take to alleviate the spread of a disease.

THE CULTURE OF MONTESSORI COUNTRY SCHOOL

MCS is a special place because of the relationships that we have with you, our school families. Every community develops its own unique “culture.” We, the staff at MCS, feel blessed to be a part of this special school and a part of your lives. Words that might describe our school culture are: open-minded, respectful, purposeful, and fun. We hope you will feel this as you become a part of the school community. In this section, you will find ways that we keep the communication flowing and keep you informed of your child’s school experience.

SCHOOL & PARENT PARTNERSHIP UNDERSTANDING

Montessori Country School is a community committed to aiding the full development of the child through the Montessori method. Our students thrive when their homes and school operate in harmony and alignment with each other. The child is best served when these environments share educational values and expectations.

To facilitate this process, this Understanding aims to:

- Clarify expectations between the school staff and parents
- Convey the need for a respectful, open, and trusting relationship between staff members and parents
- Encourage the strongest possible partnership based on these shared expectations guided by a unified vision

What does the school expect from parents?

Q: *What is the most basic expectation the school has of parents?*

A: Understand and trust the Montessori model of education, so that we can support one another in the care and nurturance of the child. Devote real and sincere effort to learning Montessori principles, and to bring these concepts into the home environment and your parenting. Principles include:

- Allow your child to overcome challenges without your interference or assistance. This builds self-esteem, a sense of purpose, and the determination to master life skills.
- To build independence, confidence, and skills, allow even the youngest child to engage in real life activities. Ensure that older children contribute to home life by participating in household tasks.
- Use positive discipline techniques with your child.
- Attend all regularly scheduled Parent/Guide Conferences and required or strongly encouraged parent education events.
- Familiarize yourself annually with our Family and Student Handbook, your classroom’s expectations, and the role of the active and supportive parent in our community.

Q: *How can parents positively support the school community?*

A: Demonstrate respect for all adults and children in our community, the school, and the school’s programs and policies.

- Model respect for your child. Speak of the school and every member of the Montessori Country School community in positive terms.

- Always work to resolve misunderstandings and conflicts respectfully and graciously. This should start with the person with whom there is conflict and, if resolution is not accomplished, speaking with the appropriate person (i.e. a member of the administration who is directly responsible for the individual or the situation.)
- Engage in our culture of giving. Sharing your time, talent, and resources all support the school community in providing the best education possible for our students.

Q: *What are my responsibilities regarding communication between home and school?*

A: Maintain respectful, direct, and active communication with the school.

- Communicate in a timely manner about all significant events in your child’s life.
- Share observations and concerns about your child or classroom experience directly with your child’s teacher. This allows the teachers to be responsive to your and the child’s needs in a timely manner.
- Read all school generated communications in a timely fashion. This includes the weekly Friday Notes, monthly Points of Interest newsletter, monthly blog posts from your child’s teacher, and all communications from the office.
- Communicate questions and concerns promptly and directly. Bring classroom concerns directly to the child’s teacher. School policy concerns should be communicated to the administrative team. If you are unsure who to contact, please contact the office for assistance.

What can parents expect from the school?

Q: *What can I expect from the school academically?*

A: *We are first, and foremost, a Montessori school with a deep commitment to best practices of Montessori education.*

- Our focus is always on the formation of the whole child. By nurturing curiosity and initiative, the child develops strong work habits, a clear sense of purpose, and the will to learn and grow.
- We recognize your child as a unique individual. Therefore, our Montessori Guides create lesson plans based on meeting each student’s specific needs.
- We support students’ self-construction as thinkers who persevere. We accomplish this through a deeper exploration and internalization of concepts rather than the memorization of facts.
- Students are given real choice in the name of liberty—freedom with responsibility.
- The opportunity to practice responsible independence gives rise to self-formation and the emergence of character. Through this work, the Montessori child develops a healthy respect for self, others, and the environment.
- All students are encouraged to take on works and projects that may seem out of their reach and require them to stretch. Though they may fail occasionally, they must not shy away from big and challenging work. Simply engaging in the struggle forges perseverance and patience as well as self-knowledge and self-esteem.

Q: *What can I expect in terms of communication from the school?*

A: We will always communicate as partners, working hard to provide open, timely, and respectful information and insight about your child and the school community.

- All communications will be approached from a place of partnership in the best interests of our students.
- We will work diligently to communicate the beauty, nuance, and growth that transpire each day in the life of your child. Absent a daily diet of worksheets and grades to mark progress, we must rely on parent/guide communication to transmit evidence of growth gained through direct exploration with ideas, materials, research, the natural world, and creative means.
- We will offer numerous opportunities to support your own ongoing Montessori education, including observations in your child's classroom (Primary and Elementary levels) and workshops, meetings, and lectures focused on the structure, curriculum, and activity in the Montessori environment.
- We will listen when you speak and respond with respect, always communicating in a timely, professional, and confidential manner.
- We will contact you directly in the event of special concerns about your child.
- Should you have difficulty resolving any issue, our administrative staff will facilitate efforts to reach a solution.
- We will inform you of school-wide news and events with the weekly Friday Notes, monthly Points of Interest newsletters, monthly classroom updates and photos from your child's teacher, information found in the Current Family Portal, and posts on social media (Instagram and Facebook).

Q: *What can I expect of the school environment?*

A: *We strive to ensure an environment that is physically and emotionally safe and supportive, as well as aesthetically beautiful.*

- We provide materials and activities in each classroom that directly correspond to the developmental stages and characteristics exhibited by your child. The materials are challenging and inspiring and the learning environments are well tended to and inviting.
- We maintain buildings and grounds that are physically safe, secure, and well maintained. We are actively engaged in enhancing and updating our facilities and grounds.
- Adults, students, and environments form the whole of our Montessori community and culture. All members play a vital role in your child's experience. We strive to make the learning environment supportive and safe for every child, in every way.

Q: *What can I expect from the school staff?*

A: We focus on the needs and well-being of the individual child in harmony with the life and well-being of the community. We make mission-driven decisions, focused on good stewardship and responsible management. We offer an open door to your questions or concerns.

- You can always expect the Montessori Country School staff to be professional and courteous, providing mutually respectful communication with all our constituents. We strive to be a model of the grace and courtesy that guides Montessori curriculum and culture.
- We work to balance the individual needs of the child with the needs of the classroom or school community as a whole.

We look forward to a working partnership with you to provide both an outstanding educational experience and warm, welcoming community for both you and your child.

(MCS received permission to use this Partnership Agreement from Greenspring Montessori School)

COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Montessori Country School is a community made up of children, parents, teachers, administration, and the Board of Trustees. Healthy communication is the foundation of a healthy community. Your input, suggestions, questions, and concerns are very important to us. As parents, you will have many questions as your child moves through the program. Some will be directly related to your child, some related more to the administrative workings of the school regarding schedules, finances, or policies. Please help us by calling as soon as a question arises. Your questions and comments are always welcome and will be openly received.

We believe that education is a collaborative effort between parents and school personnel. The relationship between the parents and their child's teacher is an important one, and we encourage parents to call at any time to have an informal chat or to schedule a special conference. Your comfort-level with the school and your knowledge of your child are very important to us.

In-School Mailbox

On the left as you exit the driveway you will find our in-school mailbox. This is the best place to put messages, paperwork, or tuition payments for the teachers or office staff. We will pick up the mail daily. If you have a message that needs to get to your child's teacher before the end of the day, please pass this to the staff member who takes your child from the car at arrival. Your message will be delivered to the right person as soon as possible. If you have something that you need to get to another parent at the school, the parent mailbox can be used for this purpose as well. Just leave it in the box with the parent's name on it and let them know it can be picked up there.

Who to Go To

Teacher: Questions related to your child and the classroom. A child's comfort level at school is certainly impacted by the comfort level of his parents. It takes time for teachers and parents to develop rapport, and this can only happen through communication. Please call the teacher right away if you have any questions regarding your child's classroom experience. Out of respect for the child, we will not talk about your child in front of him unless he is an integral part of the conversation. The best way to set up a chance to talk with your child's teacher is through an email request. You can also write a note and give it to a staff member when you bring your child to school. The teacher will be happy to set up a conference time if the matter cannot be handled on the phone. If your family is experiencing change of any kind such as visitors, death or separation from a family member, family illness, etc., please let your child's teacher know. These changes can impact your child's stress level. Knowing your child is experiencing a stressful time at home, the teacher can let you know if s/he notices signs of stress at school. Other things out of the ordinary such as changing rooms, moving to a new home, giving up a security object, having a stressful, rushed morning are also

helpful for the teacher to know. Communication from home helps us to best meet your child's needs at school.

Office: Questions related to day to day workings of the school or events such as carpool changes, clarification and/or input of newsletter items, scheduling volunteers in classrooms, fundraising, policies, and procedures, parent involvement, etc. Questions related to tuition payments or other financial policies and procedures.

Head of School: Questions related to MCS philosophy, administration, policy and/or parent support such as MCS philosophy, program, curriculum, faculty, parenting, parent involvement, community resources, school communication, parent education, fundraising, administrative and Board policies. Questions regarding the classroom directly related to your child's needs or experience should be taken first to the teacher for clarification. S/he will usually have the information and clarification you need. If you feel you need additional input or support, please feel free to speak with the HOS.

Parent Steering Committee Chair(s): Questions and suggestions related to the Parent Association such as school events, parent involvement, spring auction, parent events.

Classroom Representatives: Questions regarding events, desire to volunteer, or general questions about MCS workings and cultures.

Website Parent Portal

This is our communication and information hub for all things related to the classroom and events happening at the school. On class pages, MCS teachers will share information with our current families. It will have the school calendar, individual sites for each classroom, as well as articles and links to useful information. Teachers keep you informed of the happenings in your child's class by posting pictures and messages at least every other week.

SchoolCues

This is our on-line data base that we ask you to keep updated. It is the source for our emergency forms and school directory.

Friday Notes

You will receive memos from the office on Fridays.

Newsletters

You will receive a monthly newsletter, "Points of Interest," by email. We welcome newsletter contributions from you, our parents – sharing a great parenting book you have read, or a special activity or resource you have found. If you would like to contribute something, please write it up, label it "newsletter," and email it to the school.

Observation

Observation of your child's class is encouraged as a way for you to understand your child's classroom environment. It is best to set up an observation time with the office to avoid too many visitors in the classroom at any one time. During your observation, your

child may not exhibit a typical day, but you will have the opportunity to observe the activity in the classroom. It is important to remember after your observation that what you have seen is a small picture of what goes on throughout the school year. Please remember to be thoughtful in discussing your observation with other parents – speak only of your child and please honor the privacy of the other students. Teachers are more than happy to answer any questions you have about your observation. Let the teacher know you would like to talk, and s/he will call you after class.

Starting school is a big step for your child. S/he needs time to adjust to his/her teachers and new environment. To facilitate this adjustment, we ask that parents give their children at least six weeks before they visit the class.

Elementary parents are required to observe in the classroom prior to the January conference.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT, EDUCATION, AND RESOURCES

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents play a key role at Montessori Country School. The education of your child is a collaborative effort and one that is enhanced by your input and participation. Your child benefits from your involvement as she sees the importance you place on her school. The children are very proud of the work their parents do around the school.

Each year a Parent Participation Form is sent to every family. Filling this out gives you an opportunity to let us know where your talents and interests lie. It takes all of us working together to run a great school. The reason for the success MCS has experienced is in large part because our school parents are willing to lend a hand. We heartily invite and encourage you to become a part of our school community by offering your time and talents.

MONTESSORI COUNTRY SCHOOL PARENT ASSOCIATION

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Montessori Country School Parent Association (MCSPA) is to support and enhance the goals and objectives of the Montessori Country School as set forth by MCS Board of Trustees and the Head of School and Associate Head of School of MCS. Secondly, the purpose of the Parent Association is:

- To encourage and facilitate communication
- To provide support for the classroom and outdoor environment
- To assist in fundraising events to meet the fundraising objectives as determined by the Board of Trustees
- To assist with special school events

Membership

All parents with children enrolled in the Montessori Country School are members of the Montessori Country School Parent Association.

MCS Parent Association Steering Committee

The MCSPA Steering Committee consists of a coordinator and classroom Ambassadors invited by the Head of School with the help of the current Steering Committee Chair or Co-Chairs and the teachers.

The selection of the Steering Committee takes place in May for the following school year. If this is of interest to you, please let us know.

PARENT EDUCATION MEETINGS

Parent meetings are held throughout the year. We encourage you to attend all parent education meetings. The better you understand the goals and objectives of the school, the more your child will benefit from his school experience. Most meetings are informal in nature. Topics each year might include: an explanation and demonstration of a part of the Montessori curriculum, a discussion of parenting issues, child development, and/or ways you can “bring Montessori home.” We hope you will mark your calendars and find a way to attend these meetings.

PARENT LENDING LIBRARY

Many of our favorite books are available through our Parent Lending Library. Feel free to borrow these books for a two-week period. If you have read a parenting book and found it helpful, we would love to know about it. Our collection includes Dr. Montessori’s own writings as well as books about the Montessori Method and general parenting books. The library is in the Parent Lounge of the Children’s House.

FUNDRAISING

Like most private schools, MCS has two main sources of income: tuition revenue and revenue that comes from direct contributions and our fundraising events. Tuition covers a portion of the basic annual operating and program expenses of the school. We rely on fundraising and contributions to fill the gap between the tuition revenue and the actual cost of educating a child at Country School. Each year the Board works with the Head of School to determine the fundraising needs of the school.

For the most part, our fundraising consists of two events. One is our Annual Giving Campaign (overseen by the Board of Trustees with the kickoff at our Autumn Gathering, which is an adult evening put on by the parents); the other is our Annual Spring Auction (spearheaded by the parents.) It is our intention to choose fundraising events that not only raise money for the school, but also nurture the school community.

Below you will find a description of our fundraising events and an explanation of various ways in which you can make contributions to MCS. It is our hope that all families will become involved in fundraising at whatever level they are able.

We are deeply appreciative of the generosity of our parents. Fundraising is critical to the school and allows us to maintain the quality our community has come to expect from us.

As a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation, all contributions to MCS are tax-deductible as allowed by the Internal Revenue Service.

THE ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN

Each year MCS holds an Annual Giving Campaign. Money raised through this campaign provides unrestricted funds that assist in filling the gap between the tuition revenue and the actual cost of supporting the faculty, facilities, and programs of MCS. The annual campaign is kicked off at the Autumn Gathering, an adult evening hosted by MCS. While early participation is encouraged, gifts to the annual campaign are accepted at any time.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN

What is the Annual Giving Campaign?

The Annual Giving Campaign is a request to the Montessori Country School community for financial contributions in support of the operating budget of the school. We are grateful for the phenomenal support we receive from our current families, friends, grandparents and alumni families and students. Their tax-deductible contributions have a direct impact on the school and allow us to provide the children with an excellent Montessori education.

Why doesn't MCS charge what it actually costs to educate a child?

Most independent schools set their tuition to cover approximately 80-85% of their operating budgets. Fundraising fills the gap between what is brought in through tuition and the actual cost of educating a child at MCS. The Annual Giving Campaign allows us to keep our tuition at a reasonable level, thereby expanding the number of families who can attend, while supporting our Montessori heritage and vision of building an inclusive student body.

What is the goal for the Annual Giving Campaign? What are we expected to give?

Our goal is 100% participation from our current family, board, and staff members from whom we ask for a *donation of personal significance*. The history of our Annual Giving Campaign reflects how truly generous and dedicated our community is to the school and to Montessori education. We have reached our goal of 100% participation and expect this will continue for years to come. It has been heartwarming to see donations from alumni parents and students increase each year. A gift from our supporters of any amount is deeply appreciated!

Can I pledge now and give later?

Absolutely! If possible we would like to know of your pledge by December 31st. Many donors choose to give before the end of December since donations are tax-deductible. We do ask that you pay your pledge in full by June 30th, the end of our fiscal year.

As a current family, are we expected to give to the annual campaign even if we plan to participate in the auction?

Yes. Our Winter into Spring fundraising auction will be held in March. We absolutely appreciate and depend on the support of contributions of time and goods to make this event a success. Our goal for the Annual Giving Campaign, however, is a donation from every family, board, and staff member at the school.

Who will know the amount of my gift?

We are sensitive to your privacy. Only the MCS Head of School and the Associate Head of School will know the amount of your gift. All donors are “publicly” acknowledged, by name only, in our annual fundraising report unless they ask to remain anonymous.

Are there ways I might enhance my contribution?

Yes! MCS is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit corporation. The company you work for may have a matching contribution program and/or participate in the United Way campaign. In either case, you can designate MCS as the recipient, and your donation will count toward our goal of 100% participation. Please call the office if you would like more information.

How do donations made to “One Call for All” factor into the fundraising needs of MCS?

Donations to MCS through “One Call For All” are *specifically designated for financial aid*. We cannot use these funds to fill the gap in our operating budget for important program expenses. Some choose to split their donation to MCS by giving a portion through “One Call for All” and a portion directly to the school. Each donation of \$20 or more made to MCS through “OCFA” qualifies the school for additional funds from “OCFA.” We encourage every family to make a \$20 contribution.

How is the money raised by the Annual Giving Campaign used? Does my donation really matter?

Every donation matters and goes directly to helping support the excellent program at MCS! Your donation helps to pay for all the expenses that are incurred in running the school: supplies, insurance, enrichment, events, salaries and benefits, financial aid, pet care, facility and grounds maintenance, specialists and more! Your donation is vital to the health of our school.

SPRING AUCTION

Our big fundraiser of the year is Winter into Spring. This is a fabulous adult evening, and one you won't want to miss! Winter into Spring brings in the highest revenue of our fundraising events. Donations to the silent and live auctions are solicited from MCS families and community businesses. Special projects are completed by each class and are auctioned off during the evening. Projects in the past have included garden sheds painted by the children, quilts, and beautifully decorated pottery.

This is an event that takes lots of parent participation but is great fun. So, let us know how you would like to help. Winter into Spring is as much a fun-raiser as it is a fund-raiser!

OTHER WAYS TO GIVE

Each year we have parents who want to contribute something concrete and immediate to the school. These contributions may be made in honor of a child's birthday, a special holiday, or "just because." Teachers and staff have a wish list with ideas for school or classroom gifts. These ideas range in cost from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars. They might include books, a special classroom material, frequent flier miles that will bring down the cost of a teacher attending an out-of-state conference, special programs such as a visit from the Reptile Man or an ethnic dance group. Ask your teachers or the office for ideas.

Thank you for taking the time to read this handbook! We hope it helped to answer questions. We are always available to clarify any questions or hear your thoughts and ideas. Please keep it handy for future reference.