



## FAMILY HANDBOOK

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### Questions for parents to ponder:

*What were the most important factors that led you to select a Montessori education for your child?*

*What are the most important goals you have for your child's education?*

*What knowledge, skills and attitudes do our children need to be prepared as adults for living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

Research on children attending Montessori schools vs. traditional education programs have shown Montessori educated children show higher aptitude and outcomes in the following areas:

- Intrinsic Motivation
- Creativity and Originality of Thought
- Social Responsibility
- Academic Preparation
- Autonomy
- Confidence and Competence
- Spiritual Awareness

This family handbook, written by the staff and Board of Directors for the families of Gloucester Montessori School, explains the Montessori approach and how our school operates and answers questions that may arise throughout the school year. It is our goal to state our policies clearly and to encourage parents to support the Montessori approach in the home and other environments, in order to help your child achieve the best possible outcomes from their experience here at Gloucester Montessori School.

The school and your child's success is dependent on parent and family support in many ways, including reinforcement of the methodologies, service hours, fundraising, and contributing ideas that will enhance your child's experiences at GMS. There will be many opportunities for your involvement in the life of the school.

Any questions concerning this handbook or any policies of Gloucester Montessori School should be directed to the Head of School, Patricia Landau or the Office Manager, Angie Garrett, at 804-693-6455, Monday through Friday between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

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## THE MISSION STATEMENT

Grounded in the Montessori Method of educating children based on the individual, Gloucester Montessori School maintains an environment that fosters **Discovery, Independence, and Leadership** for students from Pre-K through Upper Elementary.

## THE MONTESSORI PHILOSOPHY & METHODOLOGY

At the turn of the century, Maria Montessori, a young physician in Rome, Italy, began to research the natural tendencies of young children, observing how they each developed an individual self through exploration and mastery of the environment in which they were placed.

Following years of observations, Dr. Montessori formulated an educational philosophy based on the recognition of a child's innate desire to learn. She sought to facilitate the normal growth of children by exposing them to direct and positive contact with the world. Montessori designed a child-based environment (the first to recognize the necessity of small furniture), created materials for sensorial learning (a heavily debated issue at that time), and meticulously sequenced lessons for positive, confidence-building experiences. Yet, possibly the most radical change in her classes was her redefined role of the adults in the classroom. No longer the "font of all knowledge," teachers were rarely heard above the din of purposeful activity interacting with students quietly on the floor or at tables and resembling more subtle facilitators than lecturers.

Since that time, Dr. Montessori's philosophy and methods have become a matter of tremendous interest among educators throughout the world. The Montessori Method allows children to proceed at their own speed, according to each child's capacities, in a non-competitive atmosphere during the early years. A typical Montessori classroom is characterized by three distinguishing factors:

1. A "Prepared Environment," arranged to be aesthetically intriguing and accessible to young children, appeals to their need to learn. Within the prepared environment, children are presented a variety of specially designed materials which address specific stages of mental, physical, and social development.
2. Carefully designed materials reinforce both graphic and abstract concepts to the child in a sequential manner, fostering coordination, concentration, independence, and order.
3. The teacher acts as the dynamic link between the child and the environment by directing and guiding, modeling appropriate behavior, observing the children's interactions, and presenting new exercises as the children demonstrate readiness.

## **GLOUCESTER MONTESSORI SCHOOL, INC.**

### **GMS Philosophy**

The Gloucester Montessori School adheres to the principles developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, (1870-1952). It is a cooperative effort between the staff and families to provide a safe, caring educational environment grounded in the Montessori philosophy. GMS focuses on the whole child and strives to maintain a balance between intellectual, ethical, social-emotional, and physical development of each child. We base our philosophy on respect for the worth of each child, and we encourage children to respect themselves, one another, and their world. GMS strives to be an integral part of the community. We welcome children and families of diverse cultural, religious, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds.

### **History**

GMS was incorporated in May 1989 to continue a ten-year tradition of Montessori education on the Middle Peninsula. The Montessori School of Gloucester, founded by Leslie Bowie in 1979, initially offered a class for children three to six years old and expanded in 1986 to include ages six through nine. When Ms. Bowie announced in March 1989 that she was closing the school, parents organized to restructure the school and keep it open.

### **Structure**

GMS is a non-profit, non-stock corporation chartered by the Commonwealth of Virginia and has been awarded tax-exempt status by the IRS under paragraph 501(C)(3). It is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of parents, community leaders, and the Head of School. In the children's houses, all students between three and six years are grouped together with the proper balance of gender maintained. The lower elementary school groups children from six to nine years together, and the upper elementary class consists of children from nine to twelve years of age. Rarely, there may be an exception to this grouping pattern.

### **Parent Involvement**

The Gloucester Montessori School is a non-profit institution and relies greatly on close school, parent and community collaboration and involvement to allow us to continue our tradition of providing a quality independent educational alternative to the Gloucester and Middle Peninsula area.

Teaching children effectively requires a close collaboration between parents and teachers. Research confirms a direct link between student success and parental involvement with the school. At GMS, parent involvement is critical to all our success – and a fine demonstration and leading by example for our children.

GMS offers several opportunities throughout the year for parent education, with sessions to help parents understand what their children are experiencing in the classroom and how Montessori principles may be applied in the home. In addition, parent-teacher conferences and observations are a great way to further inform and educate parents about the Montessori experience. There are also several enjoyable social events throughout the year to bring the school community together.

**To help the school carry out its programs and services, each family is expected to contribute 15 service hours per enrolled student per year.** There are many options and opportunities for fulfilling service hours, including classroom and/or field trip assistance, service on committees, facilities and classroom maintenance and participation in fundraisers and community events. It is vital that each family finds the time to contribute to the cooperative effort. Further definition of projects and time commitment will be available each fall.

### **Fundraising**

Tuition and fees are not enough to cover all operating expenses. Unlike many schools, GMS has no government, church or private subsidies. To cover the difference we depend on additional support from families, past and present. This support takes many forms, from participating in fund-raising efforts to sharing time, materials, and skills. Such involvement not only supports the school financially but also enriches your family's school experience by strengthening bonds, enhancing understanding and communication.

Our annual fundraising plays a vital part in the day-to-day operations of our school. We raise money to supplement tuition income and help us invest in program enhancements, teacher development and building renovations. Our goal is to keep Gloucester Montessori programs and facilities fresh and innovative, and our teachers challenged and excited.

Fundraising takes each family's participation. Our small community of parents, faculty, staff, Board of Directors, alumni, and friends can make a substantial difference in the lives of our children and future generations of Montessori children.

The school holds a variety of fundraising events throughout the year, including school pictures, bake sales, Parent Night Out, a written appeal, and a fundraising gala event. Our annual spring Not Just Desserts fundraising event is our largest fundraising activity. Participation from local restaurants and businesses ensure a fun filled evening, including live music, auction, and lots of great food. This event is entirely organized by parents and is a fun way to work towards service hours and work with other parents.

### **The Board of Directors**

The day-to-day operations of the school are managed by the Head of School according to Montessori principles, state and federal regulations and school policies. Additional governance comes from an elected Board of Directors, comprised of the Head of School, parents, and community leaders. The primary functions of the Board are to establish and sustain the school's mission, set policies and procedures for school operations, oversee the ongoing operations of the school in accordance with policies and government regulations, and set a strategic course for the long term development and success of the school. New members to the Board are elected for two-year terms by the community of parents and staff at the Annual Meeting each June. Specific information on the Board's responsibilities is outlined in the school By-Laws.

### **Affiliation**

GMS is a full member of the American Montessori Society and the Virginia Montessori Association. GMS has been licensed by the Department of Social Services of the Commonwealth of Virginia. GMS is also a member of the Virginia Council for Private Education.

## **Nondiscrimination**

GMS does not discriminate against any color, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or national origin in the administration of instruction, admission, financial aid, or any other program.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **School Hours**

Office Hours: 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Children's House (1/2 day class): 8:30 AM to 11:30 AM

Extended Day: 8:30 AM to 2:30 PM

Elementary Class: 8:30 AM to 3:00 PM

Before & After School Care: 7:30 AM to 8:30 AM, 2:30 PM to 5:30 PM

We ask that parents remember to adhere to the arrival and dismissal procedures to ensure the safety and security of all our children. A school representative will greet cars as they arrive at the front of the building and assist children in getting into the building. If you must park and enter the school, for safety reasons, always keep children by your side and do not allow children to run in the parking lot.

### **Arrival & Dismissal Procedures**

#### **Arrival**

8:30 AM to 8:45 AM            Elementary Class

8:30 AM to 8:45 AM            Children's Houses

Please enter the driveway carefully from the highway. All cars will unload students along the front of the main building at two locations in **ONE** drop-off lane. Assistants at the curb will take students from cars. **PLEASE DO NOT GET OUT OF THE CAR while in the drop-off lane.** **To speak with others, please park in designated areas.** Cars left unattended may be moved by school personnel.

A staff member will meet ALL children at the car and assist them as they enter the building. Children arriving late (after 8:45) must be escorted to the **OFFICE**. To do so, park in a designated parking space.

**Children's House students will not be admitted into the classroom before 8:30 a.m.**  
**Elementary students will not be admitted into the classroom before 8:30 a.m.**

#### **Dismissal**

11:30 AM. - 11:45 AM            Children's House (3 and 4-year-olds)

2:30 PM .to 2:45 PM            Children's House, Extended Day Classes

2:45 PM. to 3:00 PM            Elementary Classes

Children will be brought to the car by a staff member. If children are on the playground, early arrivals must wait until the children are assembled for dismissal. Please **do not come to the playground** to pick up your child.

It is extremely important that you are punctual. Children have difficulty waiting to be picked up, and late arrival can be embarrassing for your child.

**Children not picked up 15 minutes after their pick-up time will be placed in after-school care program, provided there is room. If not, children will stay in the office with an administrator.** Parents will be telephoned. If a parent or guardian has not been reached by the close of after-school care (5:30), the child will be taken to the administrator who will notify police and stay with the child until an appointed person arrives. **An hourly fee will be charged.**

In the case of an emergency, please notify the office for alternative arrangements immediately.

**To help daily arrivals and departures operate safely and quickly, please:**

- Pull up and stop so that your door is in front of the teacher
- Let the teacher open the car door and take the child from seat
- DO NOT get out of the car
- Help instill appropriate carpool behavior in your child

Please park in a parking space before coming inside the school for any reason, even for only a few minutes.

Drivers are urged to use caution when entering and exiting the highway.

We support the Virginia Child Safety Restraint Law. **Please buckle up your child!**

### **Carpool/Emergency Forms**

In order to safeguard each child, the school requires a list of **ALL** people, other than the parents, who may **AT ANY TIME** pick up your child. Students will not be released to anyone other than their regular carpool driver unless proper arrangements have been made. GMS reserves the right to ask the person requesting the release of a student to present valid identification.

If your family is part of a carpool, please submit a written driving schedule with telephone numbers and descriptions of cars to the office.

### **Foul Weather Closings**

When threatening weather creates a risk, the administrator may make a decision to delay opening or cancel school. Please note that GMS does not necessarily follow the decisions of Gloucester or Mathews county schools or area private schools in this matter. Any school closures or delays will be announced on [www.wavy.com](http://www.wavy.com) and local television station WAVY (channel 10). Parents may also check the school's website [gloucestermontessori.org](http://gloucestermontessori.org) to view any schedule change. **If school is closed while in session for any reason (weather or other) parents will be notified via telephone and are expected to pick up their child immediately. A staff person will remain with the child until the parent or guardian arrives.**

### **Absences**

All GMS students are expected to attend school on a daily basis, arriving before the start of the

school day. Consistent attendance and prompt arrival are essential to school operation and the best possible outcomes for your child. In addition, the school is accountable to Virginia state laws regarding truancy and allowable absences.

When your child is absent from school (for health or other reasons), please call the office immediately, and provide advance notification wherever possible. If it is necessary for your child to be absent for an extended period, please notify the school as early as possible. While teachers can suggest work during absentee periods, days missed from the Montessori environment are never truly “made up” by additional work. This is particularly true at the elementary level. If an elementary student is absent for more than nine (9) days, a meeting with the parents is scheduled to discuss the reason for the absences and how the child is going to make up for the lost classroom time. In special circumstances, a child may be excused for an extended absence. The teacher may provide the child with assignments and extra work to further his/her learning and help the child stay current with the rest of the class.

### **Tardiness**

Timely arrival is extremely important for students to reap the full benefit of the Montessori program. The school day begins promptly at 8:30, and at 8:45 teachers are fully engaged in classroom activities and will not be available to escort children into the classrooms. **Late arrivals are disruptive and inconsiderate to the rest of the class, and make it difficult for the child to integrate into ongoing group work. Any child arriving after 8:45 must be brought directly to the office. Three tardy arrivals are allowed within a semester; any occurrences following this will result in the child being sent home for the day.**

### **Clothing**

In the case of preschoolers, dress is left to the discretion of the parents. Simple and comfortable clothes, suitable for both outdoor play and the classroom routine, are best. The school supplies aprons to be worn when necessary to protect clothing. In cooler weather, girls are encouraged to wear tights or pants. Clothing (especially coats, sweaters, hats, gloves, and boots) should be clearly marked with your child's name. In the event that your child should need a change of clothes, please send a spare outfit in a labeled zip-lock bag to be left at school. Please label the bag as well as the clothes contained therein. If your child wears one of these items home, please launder and return it to school as soon as possible. Remember to change the child's clothes with the seasons.

When buying clothes, please make sure the child can easily remove the clothing for bathroom purposes. Tight elastics, buttons on the shoulders, and jumpsuits are often difficult for a child to remove. For safety, it is better for your child to wear close toed, rubber-soled shoes. Clogs, boots, sandals, and flip-flops are not suitable for school wear. Sneakers or other sturdy shoes are best for outdoor play.

In cold weather, children may not go on the playground unless they are dressed with a coat, hood or hat, and gloves or mittens. Children also need boots in wet, snowy or muddy conditions.

Kindergarteners and elementary students must comply with GMS uniform policy. The uniform standards for girls and boys are provided at the end of this handbook. If a child wears clothing

other than that which is described in the standards, a written reminder will be sent home to the parent that afternoon. **Three occurrences of improper uniforms are allowed within a semester; any occurrences following this will result in the child being sent home from school immediately.**

Tuesdays of each week are Dress Uniform Days, as detailed in the uniform standards. Fridays of each week are “wear what you like” days, and children are given the option to wear different clothing. Even on Fridays, however, appropriate clothing and shoes should be worn to school; clogs, boots and flip-flops are not allowed.

### **Toys**

Toys and similar "play items" should be left at home unless the teacher has an educational reason for requesting that specific objects be brought to class. Inappropriate items will be set aside to be sent home. Students may bring books and other educational objects to school, and they will be utilized. Natural finds such as turtle shells and fossils are welcome.

### **Snacks**

Students have a healthful snack in the morning. We ask that parents help by providing snack on a rotating basis during the school year. A schedule for snack weeks will be made available by the teacher early in the school year. We serve only whole fruit juices or milk. We encourage eating healthy foods and avoiding sugar-laden snacks and artificially colored or flavored snacks. Some popular choices are crackers, bagels, peanut butter, cheese, vegetable sticks, raisins, fresh fruit, or muffins. Some three-year-olds may still be susceptible to choking, so foods that could cause choking (such as grapes and peanuts) should be avoided in the Children’s Houses. Finger food is essential. Please be sure to alert us to any food allergies or dietary restrictions for your child.

### **Lunch Arrangements**

Students who are at school in the afternoons are expected to bring box or bag lunches as well as drinks to school. Lunch boxes and thermoses should be clearly marked with the student's name and not larger than the cubbies provided for storage. We encourage children to eat a nutritious, well-balanced lunch (see comments regarding snack). We also ask that parents avoid sending food that is packaged in such a way that it invites play or is distracting. For example, yogurt in squeezable plastic tubes frequently ends up on the child’s clothes or table rather than in the mouth.

### **Birthdays**

The Children's Houses have a special way to celebrate each child's birthday. The birthday child carries the globe and "orbits" the sun (represented by another child) one time for each year of life. Elementary classes will observe birthdays with time lines. While we cannot have a group party, some parents like to send a birthday treat, such as muffins or cookies, for snack. If your child would like to give the school a "birthday" gift, the library shelves always welcome new books. Please see the Classroom Wish List for additional gift ideas. For children whose birthdays occur in the summer months, celebrations will be held at the end of the school year or on their six-month birthday. Party arrangements, invitations, or gifts may not be dispensed at school by staff, parents, or students.

### **Missing Classroom Items**

Children's pockets will sometimes yield beads, miniature map pieces, a tiny cup, or some other seemingly insignificant item, any of which may be essential to some piece of classroom material. If you find such items, please see that they are returned to school immediately. These materials are expensive and may take weeks to replace. Meanwhile, the remainder of that particular piece of didactic material may have been rendered useless to the class.

### **Field Trips**

Field trips are an integral part of Montessori curriculum, and are scheduled to coordinate with subjects being studied in class or to take advantage of special community events. Advance notice of events will be posted on the website, and included in parent updates and communications.

Each trip will be attended by at least one staff person and/or qualified parent volunteer. Without parent volunteers, field trips would be extremely costly, if not impossible. Volunteer drivers must have completed a field trip form available during class orientation or in the office prior to driving on a field trip. Information and permission slips will be distributed as each trip is scheduled. The teacher must have a signed permission slip for each child in order for that child to attend the trip. Your cooperation is appreciated in returning the signed permission slips promptly. Students without permission must remain at the school.

**A copy of the insurance policy and the operator license of each driver must be filed with the office before parents are permitted to transport students.**

All children are required to wear seat belts and/or safety seats as required by state law. **No child may ride in the front seat of a car with an air bag.** Should your children fall into this category, they must have a car seat brought to the school when a field trip has been planned for their age group.

### **Playground**

The playground provides safe sturdy equipment for climbing, swinging, and balancing. The sandbox often becomes the stage for cooperative and imaginative play. A shady wooded area invites restful conversation. An open grassy area lends itself to running and more organized games. A garden bench allows quiet reflection. Generally speaking, playground activities are structured by the students. Rules for the playground are for the safety of all students enrolled and are enforced by attending adult supervisors according to Virginia Social Services guidelines.

## **ACADEMIC POLICIES**

### **School, Family and Student Responsibilities**

**Gloucester Montessori School is responsible to:**

- treat students with respect and understanding
- direct each student at his/her own pace

- provide students with a safe, nurturing environment
- encourage each student to develop his/her full emotional, social intellectual and physical potential
- provide students with access to a staff and environment that are prepared to offer an excellent Montessori education
- develop responsible independence
- encourage students to think, question, explore and achieve his/her potential as a unique, contributing member of the school community
- afford students with a curriculum that is appropriate for the ability and age of each child.
- allow each student to experience childhood as a time of learning, growth and enjoyment

**Students at GMS are responsible to:**

- treat fellow classmates, teachers and guests at GMS with respect and kindness
- try all tasks, no matter how challenging they may seem
- help others whenever appropriate
- care for other's personal property and school property
- respect all living things in the environment and assume responsibility for the care of plants and animals in the classroom
- follow the rules of GMS and the class
- make informed and responsible decisions and to accept the consequences of behavior

These responsibilities are reviewed with the students during the first week of school.

**GMS families are responsible to:**

- encourage the development of independence in your child
- provide the emotional support the child needs to function in, and benefit from this program
- trust in the Montessori Method of education
- work with other parents and teachers in activities that support the school
- participate in the election of GMS Board members as designated in the Bylaws
- attend Parent Education nights
- meet tuition payments according to contract
- participate in fundraising and community awareness events
- provide the staff with respect; bring all concerns directly to the GMS staff as needed
- get students to school on time!

**Home and School Relationship**

Creating as much continuity between home and school is probably the greatest support you can offer your children in their school experience. Families who choose Montessori generally share values, goals, and attitudes compatible with Montessori philosophy. They appreciate and

understand the school's desire to educate and nurture the whole child and not just the child's mind. From such a starting point, families and school can build a progressive relationship to enhance the child's development. Of course, not everyone in a Montessori school is alike, and homes cannot become mirror images of Montessori classrooms. However, similar expectations, responses, and objectives will offer children a consistency that will promote intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth.

### **Long Term Commitment**

We also hope that families will commit to the educational continuity afforded by GMS, where a child can be guided in a consistent method from pre-school through elementary. It is a rare opportunity to ensure the deepening and strengthening of those reasons and values that drew you to Montessori in the first place. We encourage families to visit the classes and see what wonderful possibilities await your child. Such continuity not only enhances the child's experience here, it also strengthens the whole school community. Children who have been able to grow here for successive years can truly become the bright role models that Maria Montessori describes: confident, caring, self-directed people.

### **Program Objectives**

#### **General objectives of the program at all levels are to:**

- nurture self-confidence, independence, concentration
- encourage coordination
- promote a sense of order and an awareness of self, community, and world
- encourage and direct the innate desire to learn, choose, and solve
- provide a carefully prepared environment
- hire personnel who support and are trained in the Montessori method of education

### **Children's Houses - I and II**

It is important to note that while each level is a three year continuum, each year is unique. Children move from being among the youngest to being among the oldest. They feel at home in the class and develop a repertoire of work. There is time to practice and to repeat. Materials offer the opportunity for new work at every achievement level.

Young children learn by doing, manipulating physical objects and using their senses. Gradually the shift is made to learning by manipulating symbols. When children are reading well, doing arithmetic abstractly, working independently, and evidencing social maturity, they are ready to enter the Montessori elementary class.

#### **Primary level (2 1/2 through 6 years of age) is designed to:**

- excite the child's natural curiosity in self and the world
- develop the child's ability and pride in caring for him/herself
- expand the child's concentration
- teach the child how to recognize and solve problems
- teach the child the value of physical order as a prelude to abstract academic principles
- present new concepts using concrete materials, stressing one concept at a time

- direct the child from simple to more complex tasks

### **Preschool Extended Day**

The preschool extended day program is designed for children of working parents whose circumstances require care for their children beyond regular school hours. It also serves the needs of children age three to five who are ready for a longer school day but are not yet eligible for kindergarten. It functions as an extension of the morning program, offering opportunities for learning through group and individual activities such as practical life, music, outdoor play, arts and crafts, dramatic play, science and literature. Theme units such as Dinosaurs, Health, Weather, and Cultural Studies are presented throughout the year.

The hours for preschool extended day are 11:30 till 2:30. Children are to bring a packed lunch, preferably one with items that they can open independently. Please include all necessary utensils and a “wet cloth” for clean-up. After lunch, the children have a rest time which lasts approximately thirty minutes. This can lead to some actually napping which can last up to ninety minutes. Mats are provided and “comfort items” may be brought from home if needed. Dismissal time is between 2:30 and 2:45 at which time your child will be brought to your car. If early pick-up is required, please report to the office and your child will be brought to you.

### **Elementary Level**

**The Elementary Class (six through twelve years) is designed to:**

- help the child draw on his/her own intelligence and imagination
- develop the child’s reading and language skills through personalized instruction and self-expression
- develop the child’s math skills using concrete materials to explain abstract principles
- develop the child’s ability to function in small groups
- increase the child’s responsibility for his/her own behavior and work
- increase the child’s awareness of time in relation to his/her work.

In the lower elementary classroom, children are entering (or have entered) what Montessori described as the Second Plane of Development. The prepared environment reflects goals and objectives for those social, academic, and emotional needs. While lessons continue to move the child from concrete materials gradually toward abstraction, this is a time of great expansion, as the child moves from a sensorial exploration to social and moral development. The child experiences more complex relationships within the peer group. Lessons presented probe the core questions that children are asking about their world in an atmosphere of love and an excitement for all life unfolding around them.

Curricula are integrated and kept in the historic perspective of the earth’s continual development. Through stories and impressionistic lessons, the child studies the accumulated wisdom of the ages and begins to sense the importance of each individual within a well-ordered system. Such a curriculum requires comprehension, research skills, math facts, language usage, and computation strategies. Repetition improves these skills and increases the understanding of lessons and is practiced using various Montessori materials, exercises, group projects, and individual

exploration. Mastery of information presented is demonstrated by student presentation, teaching, writing, and on-going small group sharing experiences.

## **Requirements for Entrance and Continued Enrollment**

### **General Requirements**

Students are welcomed into age and skill-appropriate programs subsequent to the following procedures:

- observation by parents
- submission of application form and fee
- interview of the child by an appropriate teacher
- favorable recommendation by the teacher and administrator
- receipt of pertinent previous school information/records
- medical and immunization records

In placement, our objective is to achieve a balance of age, sex, and ability in each class and to give special consideration to siblings and students transferring from other Montessori programs.

Parents are encouraged from the beginning of this process to view the program as a continuum. The program offers a rare opportunity for children to be nurtured in a uniquely supportive environment from pre-school through elementary. The importance of consistency between home and school in philosophy and methodology also emerges.

Students two to six years old are enrolled in the Children's House Program. All children must be toilet-trained and be physically, mentally, and emotionally capable of participating in classroom activities. Students in the elementary class range in age from six to ten years. It is rare to admit students beyond the first two years of the elementary program. Exceptions, when they occur, are subject to provisional enrollment.

During the orientation period, children will be gradually introduced to the classroom environment. The child learns the location of such features as the bathroom and the coat rack. Children also learn general classroom procedures and ground rules. These first few weeks of school are an adjustment period for each child and should be handled with patience and understanding. Children may seem unusually tired or irritable. Such a response to beginning a new routine is not at all abnormal. Additional sleep is usually necessary during periods of adjustment.

### **Provisional Enrollment**

Provisional enrollment is subject to the child's interactions with other students and the program in the first six weeks of school. During this time, recommendations based upon observations and evaluation by the teacher or other staff determines the suitability of continued enrollment of a provisionally placed student.

### **Dismissal**

The decision to remove a child for failing to meet any of these qualifications at any time shall be at the discretion of the teacher and the administrator, only after the fullest opportunity for

consultation and after every effort is made to resolve the situation. If a student is withdrawn by the parent or parents, without teacher and/or administrator approval, all contractual arrangements must be met.

### **Phasing-In**

Although returning students begin classes at the start of the school year, new students may begin at any time that a vacancy occurs during the school year. Orientation of new students is left at the discretion of the classroom teacher. The teacher may require special classes or tutorials to help children through this adjustment period. New students who are accepted for entry at the beginning of the year attend an orientation period for four days prior to the beginning of the school year. At this time, students familiarize themselves with the environment, and teachers have the opportunity to present special introductory lessons.

### **Transfer of Students between Classes**

Normally, children stay in the same environment for three years. In unusual and specific situations, students may be recommended for transfer. No child shall be transferred from one class to another unless it is determined by the teachers that such transfer shall be beneficial to the child and to the classroom as a whole. Under no circumstances shall a transfer be arranged solely to accommodate the personal desires of parents based upon considerations of convenience or personality preferences of the child.

### **Enrollment Procedure**

Parents interested in enrolling a child must contact the administrator, complete an application form, and return it to the school with the non-refundable application fee of \$50.00. An interview will be arranged between the child and the teacher. After notification of acceptance, an enrollment agreement must be signed and returned to the school along with a tuition deposit of 10% of the total tuition due. Students are not considered enrolled until a signed enrollment agreement and a tuition deposit is received by the administrator.

Parents of students already enrolled in the school must sign a returning registration form and return a tuition contract with a tuition deposit of 10% by June 1. Following that day, enrollment will be open on a first-come first-served basis. Children are not considered enrolled nor placed on the class roster until the enrollment contract and the reservation deposit are received.

### **Professional Referral**

GMS may recommend in specific situations that families seek educational, medical, or other diagnostic evaluations outside school resources. In such cases, GMS may provide a list of referral sources. Following such evaluation, staff would expect consultations with evaluators and parents to determine strategies to best meet the child's needs. GMS staff is not, however, allowed to give advice beyond their professional training and expertise.

### **Testing & Evaluation**

The Gloucester Montessori School curriculum is thorough and structured, providing hundreds of different lessons for individualized learning plans. The teachers maintain extensive records and narrative of each student's progress, which are shared, at a minimum, in the bi-annual parent-teacher conferences. In addition, the elementary students will be tested in the spring and fall using the Brigance Complete Inventory of Basic Skills. This series of tests provides valuable

diagnostic information to the instructor, as well as allowing the children to become familiar with the test-taking process. Third year students may participate in other standardized testing such as the Stanford 10 in the spring. Such tests measure achievement in individual children, the group as a whole and in comparison with other children across the nation. See the Parents & the School section of the Handbook for more information.

### **Tuition & Fee Policies**

Several plans of payment are available: a single payment in August, or two payments (one August 1, the other December 1) with a modest banking fee on the second payment, or nine monthly installments, due August 1 through April 1, again with a small banking fee. Students enrolled after August first will pay all fees and monthly installments due through the date of enrollment.

In all cases tuition must be paid on the first of each month, and in full by April 1, unless other arrangements have been made through the Head of School. Activity Fees for swimming lessons and field trips are additional and will be set by the administration. Participation in these activities is optional; if you choose not to allow your child to participate, please make arrangements to pick up your child during the swimming lesson or field trip.

After-school care is a separate program with individual fee schedules according to usage. Drop-ins are welcomed according to available space.

A check returned from the bank for any reason must be replaced with a certified check, money order, or cash within 48 hours and a \$35.00 fee will be charged.

**Payments received later than five business days after the first of the month will be subject to a late fee of 5% per month.** Payments in arrears over 60 days will be cause for exclusion of the child from the classroom with reinstatement only after all current and past-due tuition and fees are paid.

The child's school records may not be released until tuition payments and fees are current. Any questions regarding your account should be directed to the office manager or the head of school.

### **Financial Aid**

It is the policy of the school to offer financial aid to families with unusual financial needs. Parents must apply through the Princeton School and College Scholarship Service on or before April 1. Applications will be reviewed and assistance awarded in June for the upcoming school year. Applications are available in the office.

### **Student Records**

Student records are confidential, subject to access only by staff or consulting professionals. For records to be made otherwise available, parents must sign a release. GMS will maintain children's records for approximately five years.

## **PARENTS and the SCHOOL**

Gloucester Montessori School brings together families with a common commitment to the well-rounded development and education of their children. We come from different backgrounds, and our community is expanded and enhanced because of our differences. The Montessori curriculum helps children understand and appreciate the many kinds of differences and shared human values. It is critical that parents understand their role in being part of this community.

It is very important for parents and teachers to establish and maintain close communication. Good communication between home and school provides continuity that will help your child make the most of the Montessori experience. Each child's individualized lesson plan will be the primary focus for conferences, progress reports, and evaluations throughout the year. GMS has several strategies in place to formalize communication between the parents and the school.

### **Parent/Teacher Conferences**

Children's House conferences will be scheduled twice during the school year, once in the fall and once in the spring. School will be closed to the children for two days for Children's House conferences. Please make every effort to schedule your meeting during these two days in order to reduce the need for make-up conferences.

Elementary conferences will also take place two times per year in October and May. Elementary students will continue to attend class with the associate teacher during conference week. The lead teachers will arrange an appointment time for each family. As stated above, please try to schedule your conference during designated conference times. An interim report will be sent home mid-year.

We ask that you **DO NOT** bring siblings to conferences. A comprehensive report can be given only when parents give their full attention to the meeting. When possible, care will be provided during regular conference hours.

### **Issues & Grievances**

Teachers and staff are also available for consultation at other times throughout the school year. We urge you to **tell us your concerns as soon as possible**. Although the best time to speak to a teacher is between 2:45 and 3:15 p.m., you may call the office anytime from 8:00 till 4:00 and leave a message with the office manager. The Head of School can be reached from 8:00-8:30 A.M. and anytime after 2:30 P.M. Except for emergencies, please avoid calling teachers at their homes.

Please address concerns regarding your child's classroom experience to the lead teacher directly. Teachers are your first resource to answer your questions and resolve any difficulties. If the teacher is unable to resolve the request, please address your question to the Head of School.

Questions regarding the operation or organization of the school may be addressed to the office manager or the Head of School. Adhering to this procedure will insure that your concerns are addressed as quickly and thoroughly as possible. Please review the following recommended communication channels:

<b>Issue Related to:</b>	<b>First Contact:</b>
Child's progress Classroom activities Classroom procedures Classroom assistant	Lead Teacher/Directress
Academic policy Admissions Parent education Finances Facilities Legal matters Fundraising	Head of School
Scheduling & Registration Student Records Billing Observations	Office Manager

### **Parent Education Nights**

Presentations are made throughout the school year to familiarize parents with Montessori philosophy and materials. Parents and other interested persons are strongly encouraged to attend in order to increase your knowledge of the Montessori method and to become better acquainted with the teacher.

### **Newsletters**

A school newsletter is published monthly. This publication contains information about curriculum, special dates to mark on your calendar, directory additions or deletions, and parent volunteer opportunities. If you have an item that you would like to include in the newsletter, please submit it to the administrator in the school office by the 20th of each month.

### **Classroom Observation**

While we encourage classroom observations, we also recognize the vital importance of preserving the integrity of the environments for the good of the children. All observers, including parents, must check at the office to assure that others are not scheduled to observe prior to entering a class in progress. An observation sheet will be made available, and any specific instructions pertaining to the class will be given. Unscheduled visits, although not prohibited, are discouraged.

Class observations will take place usually during the morning work period, after October 15th on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. The specific number of observations granted daily will be up to the discretion of the classroom teacher and the administrator.

### **Classroom Participation**

The faculty welcomes parent involvement. If you have an area of expertise or special interest which you believe would fit into the Montessori curriculum, please sign up during orientation or in the office. However, classroom teachers reserve the right to accept or decline such offers

according to the needs of the classroom and time available.

### **Classroom Work & Work Folders**

During the school year, the school will send home a variety of school work, drawing, flyers and announcements. Please check your child's lunch box or folder daily for his or her papers and other information.

These work papers or drawings are a great source of insight into the activities your child is participating in; however, keep in mind it does not tell the whole story. Particularly at the preschool level, much of the classroom activity involves materials that are sensorial and manipulative, self-correcting, and don't have much of a 'paper trail'. The 'Parents Guide to the Montessori Classroom' is very useful to help parents interpret and understand the materials. The Montessori education is focused on the process, not the product.

If you ask your child 'What did you do at school today?' you're probably going to get frustrating answers. Young children may have difficulty talking about what they did, or remembering the names of materials, such as the trinomial cube or metal insets, or they may be in the middle of a longer term or complex work that has no paper work to show you. Try asking more specific questions, or feel free to call or email the teacher with any inquiries. Our teachers are always delighted to answer any questions about the Montessori curriculum and your child's progress.

### **Parent Library**

The school maintains a collection of literature pertinent to the education of your child. The GMS parent library contains books by and about Maria Montessori, as well as books on child development. GMS also has a collection of "Tomorrow's Child" and "Montessori Life" back issues, covering a variety of timeless topics regarding child-rearing and education. Books and magazines may be checked out at the office.

### **Service Hours**

Gloucester Montessori School needs our parents and families to participate in the broader life of the school, to give their gifts of time and expertise. **To help the school carry out its programs and services, each family is expected to contribute 15 service hours per enrolled student per year.** There are many options and opportunities for fulfilling service hours, including classroom and/or field trip assistance, service on committees, facilities and/or office help, and participation in fundraisers and community events. It is vital that each family finds the time to contribute to the cooperative effort. Further definition of projects and time commitment will be available each fall.

### **Committees**

Throughout the year, committees may be established to help the Board of Directors and school administrators fulfill its responsibility for successful operation of the school now and into the future. These committees work closely with the school administration and the Board to plan and coordinate special programs and events, and membership reflects the particular blend of skills, experience and energy best suited to the specific committee. Parents are important and necessary members of committees, providing special expertise where applicable. Committees may include the following:

Fundraising – responsible for establishing a fundraising campaign and plan for the year. Members are responsible for planning and carrying out these events and ensuring financial goals are met.

Marketing – responsible for establishing a plan for communication, marketing and advertising the school to the public, prospective families and community leaders, consistent with the school’s philosophy. Members help to collect feedback, plan communications and events, and ensure clear understanding of Montessori in the community.

Facilities – responsible for oversight of the buildings and grounds, their maintenance, improvement, conformance to codes, and identification of future needs.

## **DISCIPLINE**

GMS believes that discipline is a process rather than a method, something the student is supported in developing rather than something an adult uses. Our approach is to help the child learn responsibility and acceptance of consequences.

The basic class rules are explained, and the children are involved as much as possible in the formation of new rules. These rules are primarily based on respect for each other and the classroom. Whether the problem involves only two people or the whole class, staff helps the students to learn how to solve these problems on their own. Response by the teacher is consistent and fair. A child who breaks one of these rules is reminded of the rule, and then positively redirected. It may be appropriate that they be asked to take time out by sitting in a specific area until they feel under control and ready to abide by the rules.

Helping children develop inner discipline is a challenging joint task. As children develop increasingly greater control over themselves, they have an increasingly greater degree of freedom. How much external control imposed by the staff varies from individual to individual and changes as children change. Through role modeling and group discussions, the children see and understand acceptable behavior. Through positive redirection and purposeful activity, the children often avoid classic behavioral “problems.”

Teachers use the following methods to encourage appropriate behavior:

- verbal praise and encouragement
- granting earned independence
- notifying parents of positive behavior

Teachers use the following methods to discourage inappropriate behavior:

- restricted independence (such as sitting next to teacher, teacher selection of learning activity)
- constructive experiences (such as writing a report, removing crayon marks from walls, etc.)
- withdrawal of privileges

**GMS does not under any circumstances permit the use of physical punishment (including spanking or shaking) or emotional punishment (including embarrassment, isolation or**

## **shouting) as a means of modifying children's behavior.**

Certain behaviors demonstrated by a student make it necessary to contact the student's parent or guardian. Although the teachers are to use their discretion when making this decision, the following guidelines are used in making this determination. The parent should be notified if:

- there is a sharp change in the quality of the child's work and/or work habits
- the child is being disrespectful in tone and attitude toward the staff and other students
- the child is using inappropriate or offensive language
- the child is being alienated by other students because of socially inappropriate behavior
- the child is engaging in self-destructive behavior or language
- whenever a child physically hits, kicks or otherwise hurts another child
- the child harasses or treats another child in a manner that is hurtful, humiliating or intimidating and does not respond to intervention
- there is a sharp change in the emotional demeanor of the child (for example, increased anger, anxiety or depression)

In rare circumstances, it may be necessary to send a child home from school and suspend his or her return for one or more days. The following guidelines should be followed in determining if this is appropriate:

- the child is out of control physically or emotional and does not recover within a short period of time (15 minutes)
- the teacher is concerned that the child may injure him/herself or others and deems that the safety of the class as well as the child is in jeopardy
- the child demonstrated aggressive behavior toward others (staff and /or students) and does not respond to normal interceptive measures
- the child persistently ignores or disregards instruction from the staff and is not functioning in the classroom
- the child repeatedly uses offensive or inappropriate language and does not respond to typical interceptive measures

Depending upon the circumstances, children may return to school the following day or may be suspended for up to three days. Children who have been sent home three times in a year may be permanently excluded from the classroom.

It is a goal within the Montessori environment that each child develops inner control, respect for other people, respect for the physical environment, and the practice of using words rather than violence to resolve conflicts. Whenever a pattern of disruptive or troubling behavior becomes apparent, the teacher will contact the family. A meeting with teachers, family, and other counselors may be requested by any or all parties involved. It is particularly important to inform the school of unusual events in the life of your child that might affect behavior such as the arrival of a new sibling, illness or death in the family, the loss of a pet, etc.

## STUDENT HEALTH AND SAFETY

### Illness & Control of Contagious Disease

Children will get sick, it's a fact of life. If your child is ill and won't be coming to school, please notify the office before 9:00am so the teachers will not worry about your child. Review the list of symptoms below as a guideline for keeping your child out of school. Should your child become ill during the school day, they will be taken to the school office. A child who becomes too ill to remain in school will be sent home as soon as a parent or authorized person can be contacted. If a child has a fever of 100 degrees or more, recurring vomiting or diarrhea or develops a communicable disease while in school, parents will be asked to make arrangements for the child to be picked up as soon as possible. If any child has been exposed to a communicable disease while at school, parents will be notified within 24 hours or the next business day.

Parents will be notified promptly of any case of contagious disease (except common colds) in the school. Parents should notify the school within 24 hours or the next business day when contagious disease is diagnosed in either their child or any member of the immediate household. Life threatening diseases are to be reported immediately.

Strict observance of these policies may occasionally inconvenience you, but it is essential in minimizing the spread of illness. **A good rule of thumb: If children are too ill to play outside or to participate comfortably in the classroom, they are too ill to attend school.** Also, please keep your child at home if any of the following symptoms are present:

- Fever (within 24 hours)
- Lethargy
- Irritability
- Persistent crying
- Breathing difficulty
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea (within 24 hours)
- Mouth sores associated with an inability to control salivation
- Rash with fever or behavior change
- Pink or red eyes with discharge (until examined by a physician)
- Impetigo (until 24 hours after treatment begins)
- Head lice (until the morning after the first treatment)
- Scabies (until treatment completed)
- Chicken pox (until after the SIXTH day after the rash appeared)
- Hepatitis A (until one week has passed since onset and immunoglobulin has been given)

### Medicines

Medicines (non-prescription and prescription) can be given to your child by a MAT (Medication Administration Training) certified staff member only. Angie Garrett, administrative assistant, is MAT certified and the only GMS staff member with this training. Please take all medication directly to the office; do not send medications with your child. You must also provide a completed Medication Administration Form (available at the office) with the medication.

Prescription medications also require written instructions from the prescribing physician. Long term dosage must be updated every ten days. Further information regarding prescription medication is available in the office.

**All medicine must be in original pharmacy containers and be labeled with the child's name, dosage amount, and time or times to be given. Medications will be returned to the parent at the end of the day. The school does not keep medications (including sunscreen and insect repellent) on site except for emergency medications (such as epipens).** GMS maintains a log of all medications administered on school premises.

### **Emergency Medical Attention**

In cases of injury or sudden illness, GMS staff members assess and respond according to basic first aid training and guidelines. All teachers, the administrator, and most GMS staff maintain American Red Cross First Aid and CPR certification. Except in cases of minor injury, parents will receive an accident report immediately. Parents will be notified of minor injury by the end of the day.

If the injury to the child is severe enough to warrant professional medical attention in the judgment of the attending adult, GMS will contact parents or emergency contact persons immediately. If the parent or the emergency contact cannot be reached, the child will be transported to the nearest hospital emergency room (which is that of Walter Reed Riverside unless the student is on a field trip) by ambulance.

The completed Emergency Medical Authorization form, current physical, and immunization record will all be taken to communicate any special needs or precautions that should be observed in caring for your child. Parents will be notified immediately. Parents are expected to assume responsibility for any resultant expense.

The Board of Directors authorized the purchase of a group insurance policy which covers all our students while at school or at a school activity. This protection is provided on an "excess basis" meaning that our coverage will be excess over the student's health insurance plan, and in the event the student does not have personal coverage, then our policy will become the "primary" insurance for that student. It should be noted that decisions regarding enrollment have never taken this into calculation. One reminder, this is "accident" protections, and does not cover sickness; if there are any questions or comments, please contact the office.

### **Fire Drills**

Routine fire drills will be practiced throughout the school year as required by Virginia Department of Social Services. Students will learn where their class gathers outside the buildings as part of the evacuation procedure. Four fire drills will be held during the first four weeks of school. Teachers will explain to the children about the loud noise of the alarm. For the remainder of the school year, fire drills will occur once a month.

### **Shelter-in-Place Drills**

Shelter-in-place drills are used to prepare for scenarios such as tornados, chemical spills or intruders. During this drill, children will be contained in a designated safe area of the building and facility containment procedures (e.g., closing of fire doors or other barriers, notification of

authorities and families) will be implemented. Two drills will occur during the school year.

### **Terror Alert**

Following the events of September 11, 2001, it is important to make sure that students are familiar with GMS' emergency plans. In the case of a terrorist attack, it is most likely that the school would be reasonably safe from direct assault and remain a safe haven for the children. However, if for any reason we are not able to remain in our building, we will communicate quickly to parents so that the children may be returned to their care. Were there a need to vacate these premises, we would head for Riverside Walter Reed Hospital or Riverside Wellness and Fitness Center where medical care could be accessed. Located within a few hundred yards of the school, these facilities are reachable by foot without taking children on the highway. Such an evacuation would come as a last alternative to leaving our facility.

## **SUGGESTED READING**

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