

Montessori Children's School
Of
Key West, Inc.



mcs

Parent/Student
Handbook

Parent Handbook Contents

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GENERAL INFORMATION

WELCOME

Throughout our long history the parents, children, Directresses, support staff, and administration of the Montessori Children's School of Key West have worked in collaboration to provide the very best in education. We consider your involvement and support paramount to your child's success in the school's programs. We look forward to working in partnership with you in the education of your child.

With that purpose in mind this Parent Handbook outlines the Montessori Children's School's policies and procedures. Please keep it in a convenient place for future reference. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or need clarification of any of these policies.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Montessori Children School of Key West, Inc. is a child-centered Montessori school, serving ages two through Kindergarten. Our purpose is to nurture and guide children to become self-directed, responsible individuals of their community, by instilling solid foundations in humanitarianism and peace.

NON-DISCRIMINATION

The By-Laws of the Corporation state, "The Board of Directors will in no way discriminate on the basis of race, religion, sex or national origin in the selection of employees, students, and scholarship children."

HISTORY

The Montessori Children's School of Key West is a non-profit organization incorporated with the state of Florida since 1972. It is a cooperative enterprise administered by a volunteer Board of Directors consisting of parent and community members. Board members are elected by and from the Corporation members (parents/guardians of students). The Montessori Children's School of Key West began as a parent run school located across the street from our present location. It was a shotgun house that parents poured time and love into to create a unique learning environment for their children to grow and develop. What began as a one classroom school has since developed into five classrooms serving 18 months - Kindergarten. We are currently located on a corner block in "old town" Key West. We have six buildings on our campus, two of which are recognized as historical by HARC. Our classroom Directresses are Montessori certified and each classroom has a Directress and an Assistant. We have children at our school whose parents attended when they were children. We have been an active member of the community and will continue to be for many years to come.

PHILOSOPHY

Montessori education provides a rich and stimulating child centered learning community which encourages the child to interact with peers, the materials, and adults in positive and meaningful ways. Each classroom environment contains a set of age appropriate materials designed to attract the child's interest and attention. Everything is child-sized, permitting successful exploration and movement. Our curriculum provides the means to enable the young child to develop independence, coordination, concentration, order, and self-discipline.

Our PRE-Primary program is for children 2 & 3 years of age. It is a Montessori based curriculum with a maximum ratio of 1 adult to 9 children. Respect for the child is the hallmark of discipline at Montessori Children's School of Key West. This means that interaction between adults and children is always framed positively. The child's developmental needs are kept ever in mind.

The Primary Montessori classroom has children of mixed ages with three, four, and five year-olds all sharing the same classroom. Much indirect learning occurs in these multi-age classrooms. Younger children have role models, and the older children have opportunities to develop their potential for leadership and social responsibility. This classroom environment becomes a thriving community where children are treated with dignity and respect therefore learning to treat others with dignity and respect. Montessori believed that young children must be in a community of others to develop their full potential. She advocated groupings of 25 or more children to form their children's society. Montessori Directresses are trained to prepare these special learning environments and to observe each child's developmental signals that indicate readiness for learning.

Adults model respectful behaviors so that the children internalize what is seen and make these behaviors their own. Such principals as respect for the materials, self-discipline, and consideration for others are part of the child's day while in school.

Montessori education has stood the test of time. In the past 100 years Montessori schools have thrived all over the world. Maria Montessori's discoveries and insights have been validated by recent research on how learning and development take place. At the Montessori Children's School of Key West we are proud of our continued implementation of the Montessori philosophy and curriculum.

"Adults work to finish a task, but the child works in order to grow and is working to create the adult, the person that is to be."

Maria Montessori

POLICY & PROCEDURE

ADMISSIONS & ENROLLMENT

Pre-Primary Program

Children are admitted to the program using the following criteria:

1. Fill out and return the application with the application fee.
2. Child needs to be 22-36 months of age upon entering the program.
3. Parental Agreement to support all school policies and procedures including attendance at our corporation meetings.
4. Placement preference is given to siblings of currently enrolled students, in good standing at MCS.

Primary Program

Children are admitted to the program using the following criteria:

1. Fully toilet trained
2. 3 years old before September 1st of the application school year.
3. Developmental readiness as determined by screening and a classroom visit.
4. Parental agreement to support all school policies and procedures, including attendance at our corporation meetings.
5. Placement preference is given to siblings of currently enrolled students, in good standing at MCS.

Requirements for all enrolled students:

1. Completed Enrollment form, signed Tuition/Enrollment Agreement
2. All fees due must be current, unpaid accounts must be cleared at end of each school year
3. HRS Form Florida Certificate of Immunization or HRS Form Request for Exemptions from Immunizations
4. Current State certified Health Exam
5. Forms – Influenza, Know your Childcare Facility & Video consent
6. Complete a 45-day probationary period

TUITION & FEES

Tuition is paid annually in advance or payable in 10 equal installments, the first installment due before the first day of school and thereafter on the first day of each month, September through May. Tuition is non-refundable for any month during which a child attends any part. As stated in the tuition agreement, the parent agrees to pay the remaining tuition installments for the student who attends school after April 1 of the school year regardless of whether or not the child completes the school year.

Each party responsible for payment of tuition signs a Tuition/Enrollment Agreement prior to admission which obligates them for payment of tuition for the full school year. The agreement states tuition amount, method of payment, and Workpay obligations.

The security deposit is payable upon acceptance to the school. Deposits are refundable upon withdrawal from the school; however we appreciate your consideration of making this a donation to the school.

DEPOSITS ARE NOT REFUNDABLE WITHOUT A 30-DAY NOTICE. There shall be no offset against tuition installments by the security deposit. Any account with a past due balance after the 5th of the month will be charged a \$25.00 late fee. If an account is more than 30 days past due, the child will not be permitted to attend school or extended care until arrangements are made with the Business Manager.

All payments are made to The Montessori Children's School of Key West, Inc. Payments may be mailed to the school at *1221 Varela Street, Key West, FL 33040* or delivered to the office. Payments may be made by check or cash or credit card. We offer a 45-day probationary period which allows you and the school to determine that our Montessori program is a good fit for your child. If during the probationary period it is found that the program is not appropriate for your child by either the school or the student's parents, the security deposit will be refunded in full less any monies owed to the school.

SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID

We have established scholarship and financial aid funds to help offset the cost of private education and make the benefits of Montessori education available to more families. Private donations are welcome. Partial tuition grants are awarded. Any child who is a current student at the Montessori Children's School is eligible to apply for assistance while currently enrolled. Information regarding scholarship and financial aid is available in the school office. Financial aid is also available through Wesley House Family Services, located on Truman Avenue.

OFFICE HOURS The office is open from 8:00am – 3:30pm on school days.

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

Classes begin at 8:30. Your prompt arrival ensures that your child enjoys the full benefit of the Montessori learning environment.

PRE-PRIMARY PROGRAM

Please park your car and walk your child to the classroom. It is imperative that you DO NOT park in the drop off zone in front of the school. The drop off zone has a yellow curb and is used for the primary students. Please sign your child in on the sign-in sheet when you drop off your child. You must also sign your child out at dismissal. Place your child's belongings in the designated area. When picking up your child, please enter through the office as the side gate will be locked. Pick-up time is at 11:30am. Be considerate of the pick-up time as our Pre-Primary staff needs to be with our full-day children. A fee of \$1.00 per minute will be charged to those parents who are late picking up their child.

- ***PLEASE NOTE - We are not prepared to receive children before 8:15am.***

It is school policy that children will be released only to their parents or other authorized persons whose name is on file in the office. Please keep your pick-up list up to date, and be sure to include carpool arrangements.

*****YOU MUST GIVE WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FOR A PERSON NOT ON YOUR LIST TO PICK UP YOUR CHILDREN. THAT PERSON MUST BE ABLE TO PROVIDE A CURRENT PHOTO ID VERIFYING HIS/HER IDENTITY*****

PRIMARY PROGRAM

Staff will be at the gate from 8:15 – 8:30 to escort your child from your car to the gate.

To ensure the safety of the children and keep traffic flowing, please follow these arrival procedures.

- Pull all the way forward in the drop-off zone.
- Allow our staff person to help your child from the car.
- If you walk your child in, please park your car legally away from the drop-off zone. Please take care to note "residential only" parking spaces.
- If you arrive between 8:00am – 8:15am, park your car and escort your child to the classroom.
- We are not prepared to receive children before 8:00am. The gate and office are closed until 8:00am.

LATE ARRIVALS

If you arrive after 8:30am, park and bring your child to the office to get a late slip. You may walk your child to the classroom, but please do not enter with him or her. If your child will not arrive until after 9:00am, please bring your child to school during lunch-time to avoid disrupting the classroom. If you have a doctor's appointment, please let us know and we will inform the staff of your child's expected arrival time.

DISMISSALS

Half-Day Dismissal is at 11:45pm

- Park your vehicle and come into the school.
- Sign your child out in the sign-in/sign-out book.
- You may wait outside your child's classroom as long as you are not a distraction to the children as they prepare for lunch and dismissal.

Full-Day Dismissal is from 2:30pm – 2:45pm.

- Pull all the way forward in the pick-up line. As you approach the front of the line, your child will be brought to your vehicle.
- Allow our staff to help your child into your car.

- Please have your child's car seat on the right hand side of the car.
- Children not picked up by 2:45pm will be placed in the after school program, and parents will be charged accordingly.

PLEASE NOTE: Early dismissal time is at 12:45pm

It is school policy that children will be released only to their parents or other authorized persons on file in the office. Please keep your pick-up list up-to-date, and be sure to include carpool arrangements.

*****YOU MUST GIVE WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION FOR A PERSON NOT ON YOUR LIST TO PICK UP YOUR CHILDREN. THAT PERSON MUST BE ABLE TO PROVIDE A CURRENT PHOTO ID VERIFYING HIS/HER IDENTITY*****

ATTENDANCE

Please notify the office by 8:30am, if your child will not attend school that day. If you anticipate an extended absence, please discuss this in advance with your child's Directress.

AFTER SCHOOL CARE PROGRAM

The school offers after school care to all currently enrolled full-day students. The hours of the program are 2:30pm – 5:30pm. Pre-registration for this program is strongly encouraged and enables us to plan and prepare a higher quality program. Spaces are limited, so attendance for students not pre-registered is not guaranteed. **To ensure adequate staffing, care will be offered on early dismissal and professional days to pre-registered children only. A fee of \$1.00 per minute will be charged for children picked up after 5:30pm. Please be sure to sign-out your child, with your signature and time of pick-up.**

If an account is more than 30 days past due, the child will not be permitted to attend the after school program until arrangements are made for payment.

SCHOOL CALENDAR & WEATHER DAYS

The school calendar closely follows the Monroe County School District calendar. Please post your school calendar at home.

In the event Monroe County declares a Hurricane Watch for our area, the school will promptly close, and all children will be sent home. When Monroe County schools close for other reasons, we will follow their lead. Parents need to plan ahead and make arrangements for emergency pick-up for your child.

DISCIPLINE IN THE MONTESSORI CLASSROOM

We use a positive approach to discipline. Our students enjoy considerable freedom of movement and choice within carefully defined limits. Cooperation and collaboration are encouraged as opposed to competition. Adults consistently model kindness and respect. When there is a problem, the adult assures the child that it is the behavior that is inappropriate not the individual. The child is always treated with kindness and respect. Threats and punishments are NEVER permitted and consequences are explained. Children are given choices, and are encouraged to understand the consequences of their decision.

If a child becomes disruptive, he or she is asked to leave the situation and sit quietly nearby until he or she feels ready to return. Children who become a serious disturbance to others will be taken by a staff member to a quiet place in order to become calm enough to return to the classroom.

Our discipline approach uses natural and logical consequences and is never punitive. Natural consequences allow the child to experience the consequences of his actions and do not involve adults. If the child refuses to eat his lunch, he will be hungry later. Logical consequences are applied by the adult and are directly related to the misbehavior. Tearing the pages of a book results in the adult removing the book from the child's possession, and the child and perhaps parents take the time to fix or replace the book. Practice in fully experiencing responsibility for the consequences of one's own behavior is a most effective means towards the development of self-discipline. When the staff deems necessary, the Head of School is involved in the disciplinary process. Children that continuously do harm to themselves or others will be asked to leave the program if it is deemed that the behavior will not change. Much discussion will take place prior to dismissal.

Biting Policy

If a child bites another child, the parents are contacted and the child is sent home immediately.

HEALTH & MEDICATION

Children are expected to be in good health when attending school. Please do not send to school a child who shows any signs of illness. We reserve the right to send home a child who shows definite or continued signs of ill health that may jeopardize the general welfare of the class. If your child contracts a communicable disease, such as conjunctivitis (pink eye) or strep throat, please notify us on the first day of its occurrence. We practice the "24 hour rule". If your child is sent home from school due to vomiting, excessive runny nose, fever of over 100 degrees, or diarrhea, it is necessary for you to keep your child home for a minimum of 24 hours before returning to school. Having a sick or contagious child attend school jeopardizes the health of others and will be avoided at all times. Additionally, Montessori Children's School

subscribes to a *NO NIT, NO LICE* policy. If your child/family experiences a breakout of head lice, please keep your child home until all live lice and nits are eradicated and notify the school so we may ensure other children are lice free.

Please do not send any type of prescription or over the counter medication to school in your child's lunchbox or backpack. If your child must receive prescription medication during school hours, bring the medication to the office in the original container. Complete and sign all necessary forms.

In the event of injury the school will seek immediate care for the child following the instructions on the enrollment form. In the event the parents or authorized agents cannot be reached, a staff member will secure medical attention for the child. The school does not assume any financial responsibility for any action taken due to an emergency. An incident report will be completed, signed by staff, the parent, and the Head of the School, and placed in the child's file.

*****IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT PARENTS KEEP THE EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION IN THE OFFICE UP TO DATE.****

CHILDREN

CLOTHING

To help our students towards self-reliance you are strongly urged to send your child to school in clothes that they alone can manage in the bathroom. For your child's comfort at school, we recommend casual play clothes that can be easily laundered. Closed-toe shoes with rubber soles are the safest for active play outside. Velcro fasteners will facilitate independence. Flip-flops, platform sandals, dress shoes, or any shoe that is not secure on the foot are not appropriate for school. Jewelry often becomes a distraction and is best left at home.

Each child needs to bring a change of clothing in a clearly labeled large zipper-lock bag. Include shirt, pants or shorts, underwear, and socks. When soiled clothing comes home, please send a fresh supply the following morning. **Please mark each item of clothing with your child's name.**

FOOD

Pre-Primary and Primary Program Full-Day Students

Each student must bring a lunch in a clearly labeled lunch box. We ask that you avoid lunch boxes with cartoon or other commercial images on them. Be sure to include a freezer pack in the box, as we are unable to provide refrigeration for children's lunches. Provide a nutritious lunch consisting of whole foods, proteins, fruits, vegetables, and avoid excessively sweet and salty foods. Pre-packaged "kid's meals" contain an overabundance of sodium and preservatives and very little nutrition. Gum, candy, soda, glass containers, and junk-foods are

not permitted. A thermos will keep foods hot until lunch time. We have "Pizza Fridays" when we serve pizza, juice, and fruit for children who opt for it. Pizza is billed monthly or annually. We provide a healthy morning snack. Additionally, the cutting and serving of fruits and vegetables is an important daily practical life classroom activity. If your child takes part in our aftercare program, please add an additional snack to your child's lunchbox.

BIRTHDAYS

Birthdays are a very special occasion in the young child's life. In the Montessori classroom we celebrate birthdays with a special ceremony. The child carries a globe around a symbolic sun while a highlight of each year of his or her, life is told. Typically, children bring in a treat to share that follows our nutrition guidelines such as fruit, muffins, mini-bagels & cream cheese, frozen juice pops. **Cakes, cupcakes, presents, hats, and party favors are not permitted.** Your child's Directress will inform you of the specific activities that will take place in the classroom for this celebration.

In lieu of a treat, children may like to present the class with a book to celebrate their birthday. On this special day the child will also learn the pleasure and value of giving as well as receiving. Families who wish to participate should inscribe the book with the child's name, birth date, and the birthday the child is celebrating. Parents are encouraged to consult their child's Directress as to the choice of book.

FIELD TRIPS

During the year, a few field trips will be planned for academic enrichment and the occasional recreational outing. A Field Trip Permission Form will be sent home prior to any outing. You must sign and return it to school in order for your child to participate. A field trip fee may be collected in advance. Parents who drive students in their car must provide a copy of their insurance card to the office.

CELEBRATIONS & HOLIDAYS

One aspect of the Montessori curriculum is the study of traditions, cultures, and customs of different people throughout the world. One significant way to learn about people and cultures is through the study of holiday customs. Our approach to the recognition and celebration of various holidays is educational. We celebrate the diversity of all ethnic and religious backgrounds in our community without subscribing to any specific religious organizations or practices. We invite all families to share with the children their special cultural traditions.

Corporation members are allowed to rent the playground area of the school for private celebrations. Please see the office for details and necessary documents.

PARENTS

WORK PAY PARTICIPATION

The work pay program is an integral part of the school. It allows parents to contribute time rather than money, keeping tuition and extended care rates as low as possible.

Both Primary and Pre-Primary families obligation consists of 20 hours of volunteer time during the school year and attendance at the 3 Corporation Meetings annually. There are many forms of participation available. Committee work, campus beautification, donation of materials, school maintenance and board membership are just some of the possibilities.

FUNDRAISING PARTICIPATION

All parents must contribute time and work to various fundraising endeavors throughout the school year. Fundraising is essential at our school and is a part of the annual budget. Your participation in fundraising shows your commitment to the school and your child's education. Both Primary and Pre-Primary families are required to contribute 5 hours of fundraising efforts. Additionally, our main fundraising event for the school consists of selling raffle tickets for our February event. In addition to the above required hours, ***each family is obligated to sell (or pay for) the required amount of tickets issued (15 tickets at \$10.00 each, or \$150.00).***

NON-PARTICIPATION IN VOLUNTEER HOURS

It is highly recommended that you participate in the volunteer time required at MCS. In the case that you are unable or unwilling to complete the hours, you may pay for such hours. Non-participating families may donate \$500 per school year and attend the quarterly Corporation Meetings to fulfill this responsibility. You will still be required to do your fundraising volunteer hours.

Hours are documented on workpay cards, available in the office. The volunteer hours are per family not per child. If your hours have not been completed you will be billed for those remaining incomplete hours in January each year. Donations other than personal services are tax deductible.

COMMITTEE PARTICIPATION

A good way to complete your work pay hours is to join a committee and work with other parents. Some of the committees available are:

- Fundraising: Implement large and small events and activities.

- House & Grounds: Keep our campus and classrooms looking beautiful.
- Hospitality: Organize refreshments for corporation meetings and special events.
- Office support
- Grant Writing
- Public Relations: Work with the Head of school to generate press releases, publicity, copy, and photography.
- Work pay coordination: Schedule, allocate tasks, and record hours worked.
- Classroom projects: Assist in the classroom as needed.
- Materials or snacks purchased for the classroom or pizza Fridays.
- Lunch time helper
- Maintenance
- Planning and Development: Work on future planning of your school.

CORPORATION & BOARD MEETINGS

Corporation meetings are held three times per year in September, January, and May. Parents are required to attend at least two of these meetings. If you do not attend a minimum of 2 Corporation meetings a year, your account will be charged \$50.00. Board meetings are held monthly and are open to all parents. Minutes from all meetings are available in the school office upon request.

CONFERENCES/OBSERVATIONS/PARENT EDUCATION

Parent/Directress conferences are scheduled each year to discuss the child's progress and development. Parents are always welcome to schedule a conference with their child's Directress at any time throughout the year to address any concerns.

We have an open observation policy, but do ask that you make an appointment to avoid having more than one parent observing on any given day. Stop in the office for our observation schedule and guidelines before entering the classroom. Please make other care arrangements for younger siblings during your observation time.

COMMUNICATION

If you need to speak with your child's Directress, please leave a message in the office, and she will call you at her earliest convenience. You may also email your child's Directress through your own email program or via the school's website. All email addresses follow the same configuration: "*first name*"@montessoriskeywest.com (i.e., rita@montessoriskeywest.com)." During school hours Directresses are expected to give 100% of their attention to the children. They are not available to take phone calls or conduct unscheduled conferences.

Each week a folder will be sent home containing classroom work and notices from the office. Please be sure to read these, as they will keep you informed of the activities and needs of the school. Please remember to return the folder to school for redistribution the following week. You will also receive newsletters via email on a weekly basis from the office and bi-monthly letters from the classroom. This is an important form of communication with important dates and pertinent information about our school. If you are unable to accept email it is your responsibility to obtain a hardcopy from the office. If you have a question regarding the curriculum or your child's progress in the classroom please speak to your child's teacher. If you have a question regarding policy you may speak with the Head of School and if you have questions regarding your account, please speak with our Business Manager.

SCHOOL DIRECTORY

A school directory is published at the beginning of each school year giving the names, addresses, and phone numbers of all the families in our school. If there is any part of this information you prefer not to share, please notify the office.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO HAVING YOU AS PART OF OUR FAMILY AT THE MONTESSORI CHILDRENS' SCHOOL!