



Elementary Program Handbook

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The Montessori Method	3
The Elementary Community	4
Elementary Student Characteristics	4
Elementary Program Daily Rhythm	5
The Prepared Environment	5
Arriving on Time/Drop Off	6
Pick Up	6
Allergies	6
Providing Snack in the Elementary Program	7
Lunch	7
Appropriate Clothing	8
Birthday Celebrations	8
Sick Policy	8
Behavior Policy	9
Communication	9
Student-Led Conferences	10
Field Trips/Learning Expeditions	10
Library Trips	10
WalkAbouts	11
Aftercare	11
Toys	12
Sunscreen and Bug Spray	12
School Work Pay	12
What To Bring For the Elementary Program	12

The Montessori Method

The Montessori Method of education, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori, is a child-centered educational approach based on scientific observations of children from birth to adulthood. Dr. Montessori's Method has been time tested, with over 100 years of success in diverse cultures throughout the world.

It is a view of the child as one who is naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared learning environment. It is an approach that values the human spirit and the development of the whole child—physical, social, emotional, cognitive.

Components necessary for a program to be considered authentically Montessori include multi-age groupings that foster peer learning, uninterrupted blocks of work time, and guided choice of work activity. In addition, full complements of specially designed Montessori learning materials are meticulously arranged and available for use in an aesthetically pleasing environment.

The teacher, child, and environment create a learning triangle. The classroom is prepared by the teacher to encourage independence, freedom within limits, and a sense of order. The child, through individual choice, makes use of what the environment offers to develop themselves, interacting with the teacher when support and/or guidance is needed.

Multiage groupings are a hallmark of the Montessori Method: younger children learn from older children; older children reinforce their learning by teaching concepts they have already mastered. This arrangement also mirrors the real world, where individuals work and socialize with people of all ages and dispositions.

Dr. Montessori observed that children experience sensitive periods, or windows of opportunity, as they grow. As their students develop, Montessori teachers match appropriate lessons and materials to these sensitive periods when learning is most naturally absorbed and internalized.

In early childhood, Montessori students learn through sensory-motor activities, working with materials that develop their cognitive powers through direct experience: seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and movement.

In the elementary years, the child continues to organize his thinking through work with the Montessori learning materials and an interdisciplinary curriculum as he passes from the concrete to the abstract. He begins the application of his knowledge to real-world experiences.

This organization of information—facts and figures—prepares the child for the world of adolescence, when thought and emotion evolve into understanding more abstract, universal concepts such as equity, freedom, and justice.

The Lower Elementary Community

The Montessori elementary curriculum was developed as an integrated whole to serve the developmental needs of children from ages 6 to 12. Dr. Montessori termed this period the second plane of development. The continuity of the curriculum allows individual children to move through the various subject areas at the pace that is best for them, building confidence and genuine self esteem. The division of the elementary into two stages, 6-9 year olds and 9-12 year olds, is based on the students' developmental needs as they move towards adolescence. The work in the lower elementary is done with extensive Montessori material allowing the children not only to experience depth and breadth of the curriculum, but also to become comfortable with their own learning styles. The upper elementary students, ages 9-12, transition to more abstract thinking relying more heavily on books and other resource material as they strengthen the work begun in the lower elementary. The overall goal of the Montessori Lower Elementary is to provide a prepared environment that meets the needs and tendencies of the child at this stage of their development.

Lower Elementary Student Characteristics

Characteristics of the children ages 6-9:

1. The reasoning mind is very important.
2. For every answer the children have a question, "Why?"
3. By the time they reach the second plane, the child achieves a certain degree of independence and will continue to strive for more independence.
4. Exploration is another characteristic of this age level and often the child wants to go beyond the usual expectation of their age level.
5. The child often turns outward to the broader society and the world beyond herself.
6. Friends become increasingly important to the child at this age.
7. The children sometimes create secret languages.
8. The child often becomes more adventurous and daring.
9. Some children become "untidy" with personal belongings.
10. During this stage of development, the children's conscious becomes "keener"; they develop better ideas of right and wrong, and they often seem to have a stronger understanding of rules and regulations.
11. Hero worship is characteristic of this stage.
12. They have enormous potential of intellect and power of imagination in this stage.

Elementary Program Daily Rhythm

Spanish Lime

8:00	Arrival at United Street Gate
8:15	Work Cycle
11:30	Lunch
12:00	Recess
1:00	Enrichments/Work Cycle/Focus Groups/Jobs
2:30	Dismissal at United Street Gate

The Prepared Environment

The prepared learning environment presents children with the possibility of freedom and opportunities to develop self-discipline. The classroom environment is prepared to support six developmental tendencies shared by all children.

- 1. Exploration:** Children need to explore, from their first efforts to conquer the home environment to the subsequent drive to reach out into the community and the world. Our classrooms provide abundant, age appropriate hands-on activities designed to provide opportunities for exploration and movement.
- 2. Orientation:** The need for orientation and order are provided for by establishing predictable classroom routines and by carefully sequencing activities on shelves by subject area. The classroom is designed to encourage calm, orderly, independent learning and exploration.
- 3. Imagination:** Human tendencies for imagination and abstraction are the focus of the vast scope and sequence of the curriculum. Each part of the curriculum begins by presenting children with the big picture. This is followed with diverse ways for them to explore subjects that capture their imagination and lead to abstraction.
- 4. Repetition:** Opportunities for repetition and manipulation of materials allow children's discoveries to become part of their broad background of knowledge. Children work on activities at their own pace, choosing materials they would like to use and working for as long as the material holds their attention.
- 5. Precision:** The drive towards precision and perfection inclines each child to imagine solutions, try them out, and if successful, use them to solve real-life challenges in the prepared environment.
- 6. Communication:** Finally, communication allows children to cooperate with others, learn the wisdom of the past and make their contributions to humanity.

Children delight in work where it leads to a sense of discovery. They gain the same feeling of worth from purposeful activities in school that adults experience as they go to their jobs and do their "work." This delight in learning and sense of worth are as much a focus of the curriculum as the details of what the children learn.

Arriving on Time/Drop Off

The gates of The Children's School open at 8:00 a.m. The Children's School cannot accept students prior to that time. Drop off is located at the United Street gate. Pull all the way forward to allow space for other arrivals. Please stay in the car while your child walks independently to the classroom. It is imperative to arrive at school on time at 8:00. This allows children to acclimate and socialize before the start of their work day. When children arrive late, it becomes hard for them to adjust and transition because they have missed key elements of their daily schedule. If you arrive after 8:15 you will need to park elsewhere and walk your child to the front office. Please stay out of the car line after 8:15.

Pick Up

As parking is limited, we ask that you drop off and pick up quickly at the United Street gate. Pick up is at 2:30pm at the United Street gate. You may walk up to the gate or remain in your car. A staff member will send your child out to you.

Parents/guardians must register all adults who will be picking up or dropping off their child in advance in the front office. The person picking up or dropping off the child must present a photo ID to the staff.

The Children's School is always striving to improve our systems on a relatively small campus. If drop off and pick up procedures change, parents/guardians will be notified by email in advance from the Executive Director.

Aftercare pick up is located in the Spanish Lime Classroom and outside area.

Allergies

At this age in development, a child can understand what they can safely eat or what may harm them if consumed; therefore, the Elementary program does not require the entire class to strictly dictate the limitations of food for all based on the allergies within the classroom like the younger programs.

Providing Snack in the Elementary Program

Students at the Elementary level are responsible for providing their own snacks.

Friday snack/supplement to pizza lunch is on a rotation. The list is provided for you. In the case of an absence, please coordinate a trade with another family. Remember, this counts toward your work hours.

Examples of Food Choices for Snack

Fresh Fruit: Apples, bananas, cantaloupe, honeydew, seedless grapes, watermelon, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, mango, peaches, plums

Fresh Veggies: Avocados, carrots, cherry tomatoes, broccoli

Grains: Crackers, goldfish, rice cakes, tortilla chips, cereal, veggie sticks, pita bread

Dairy: Yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese

Other: Salsa, hummus, guacamole, apple sauce, raisins

Lunch

If your child needs utensils to eat any item within his/her lunch, please include those utensils inside the lunchbox. We do not provide refrigeration for lunch boxes; therefore, if you want your child's lunch to remain cold please include an ice pack inside the lunchbox.

We do not restrict what your child eats during lunch; we believe that if you and your child packed the food, then you have approved the food and there is no right order for your child to then consume that food. Please remember this philosophy when you and your child are preparing your child's lunch and ask yourself, "Will I be upset if my child eats this and not that?" If you answer yes, then just do not include that food in your child's lunch. Please do not include dessert-like items such as cookies, jello, pudding, brownies, candy, and fruit gummies, or any packaged food with sugar as a primary ingredient, when packing your child's lunch as per school policy.

If your child attends aftercare, please pack enough options for a midmorning snack, lunch and after school snack, remembering that anything within his/her lunchbox will be available to eat at both at lunch and aftercare snack times.

Appropriate Clothing

Wearing clothing that has fictional, fantasy, or super hero characters on it is strongly discouraged at school. The Montessori community believes that children are in a sensitive period for absorbing information and we want to provide them with reality-based, factual experiences. Fictional, fantasy dress can often be a distraction and/or lead to distracting behaviors.

Birthday Celebrations

In a Montessori Classroom each child is given a celebration of life which is a wonderful way to celebrate a birthday by honoring a child's life and accomplishments. Please send in photos, one for each year of your child's journey so far. Your child will create a timeline in class to share during their celebration. The birthday child and a friend make banana bread to share with the class after lunch that day. We will send notes asking for ingredients as we

need them.

Sick Policy

Your child will get sick this year especially if it is their first experience in school. All classrooms, surfaces, and materials are sanitized daily. Do not be surprised if your child seems to be more sick than usual. They are building up important antibodies.

If your child has:

- green or yellow mucus
- a fever above the normal temperature of 98.6 degrees
- has vomited or had diarrhea during the night or day before
- a rash on the hands, feet, or around the mouth
- lice

It is school policy that he or she may not attend school for at least 24 hours, until the rash or lice is treated, or with a note from the doctor. If your child has any symptoms, please keep them home and give them ample time to rest and heal.

If your child is diagnosed with a communicable disease (lice, hand/foot/mouth, scabies, etc.) please inform the school and your classroom's staff so that the classroom, materials, and environment can be sanitized to prevent further transmission and other families can be informed. Your child can return to school after discussion with the Executive Director regarding your child's medical treatment.

Behavior Policy

When an unsafe or unacceptable behavior occurs, we use our knowledge of the child and observation of the incident to figure out the motivation behind the behavior.

The teachers always communicate with the children throughout the process in order to help them recognize and understand their feelings and behaviors.

We encourage the children to check on their friends and offer help in place of saying, "I'm sorry," in order for the children to develop a sense of empathy as opposed to a programmed response.

If a child is not in control of his or her body and/or feelings, we offer a safe, welcoming area within the classroom for them to learn how to regulate their feelings and regain control. The Peace Area is not a punishment, but a tool for the children to use when they feel out of control. We encourage parents to attend our educational nights to become more informed about our program and to develop more consistency between home and school.

If an incident results in the destruction of materials or the injury of another person, a behavioral report will be filled out and required to be signed by the teacher, the director of the school, and the caregiver. If follow up meetings are required in order to discuss behavior or how to support the child as a team, arrangements will be made between the

school and the family.

Communication

We believe that the exchanging of information and open communication is essential to the success of the Montessori philosophy. As a school, we will provide various ways in which to share information about the school, the philosophy, and your child.

School-wide news will be sent via email on a weekly basis to inform your family on upcoming events, opportunities to give back and volunteer, and share insights about Montessori philosophy and how it is used to guide your child's experience at school.

Weekly, families will also receive photographs of the children working within the classroom. These photographs are meant to visually share information about the activities and lessons our children experience during the school day and help connect families to their children and to the classroom. They are a great conversation starter.

The school also has a website and Facebook page to share the school calendar, blog posts, and articles related to Montessori philosophy and Montessori practice.

Although it is tempting to strike up conversations at arrival and dismissal times, the staff views these times as important transitions for your child and the focus must therefore be on the children. We welcome the sharing of pertinent information such as a sleepless night, not eating breakfast, or a situation that triggered an emotional response in your child, as that type of information can help us to support your child throughout the day. If you need to speak at length regarding a question, a situation, or a concern, we ask that you request a scheduled meeting to exchange information.

If important information must be relayed to your child or your child's teacher during the school day, you should call or text the office at 305-294-5302.

Student-Led Conferences

Conferences will be scheduled twice a year, in order for teachers, caregivers, and students to get together in a casual and comfortable face to face setting to discuss your child's progress and development, once in the winter and again in spring.

The Elementary students conduct two student led conferences a year. The student-led conferences are a great way for your child to reflect on their strengths and hardships in the classroom and share their goals with you. Goals are set with the teacher prior to and shared with during the student-led conference. Parents are welcome to share in the goal setting process.

If you would like to meet with the teacher a few days after the day after the student led conferences are reserved for Parent Teacher Conferences. Should your family or your child's teacher feel additional meetings are necessary, more meetings may be scheduled

that work best for both the teacher and family.

Field Trips/Learning Expeditions

Children in the Elementary Program will be invited to attend field trips/Learning Expeditions throughout the year. The school will provide all information regarding the field trips and require families to fill out and sign permission slips in order to allow each child to participate in these trips. It is the responsibility of the parents/guardians to decline a planned field trip/Learning Expedition and make arrangements for the care of their child on the day of the planned field trip/Learning Expedition..

The school may also request the attendance of volunteers to accompany the classrooms on these trips and we welcome parents and caregivers to attend.

Library Trips

Literacy skills and book access are the most significant factors influencing a child's educational success. All elementary students must have a Monroe County library card to check out books. Photocopies of their scan code will be made and kept at school so that students do not have their cards with them for our visits.

We expect families to help create a community of readers by providing support on making good reading selections, creating and sticking to a regular home reading routine of at least 15 to 30 minutes of daily reading, and modeling healthy habits by having family reading time or reading aloud to your child(ren). Consider the findings:

- Reading fosters early learning; and creates brain connections that promote language, cognitive, and social/emotional development.
- Reading with your child helps cultivate a lasting love of reading. Reading for pleasure can help prevent stress, depression, and dementia.
- Decades of early literacy research provide evidence that the interactions young children enjoy at home with their caregivers, especially conversation and hearing stories read aloud specifically play a significant role in academic success and beyond.
- A data set analysis of nearly 100,000 U.S. school children found that access to printed materials — and not poverty — is the “critical variable affecting reading acquisition.”
- MRI scans show increased brain activity in children whose parents read with them regularly.

Students receive instruction in choosing "just right" books and will select content in the children's and young adult (for upper elementary) sections, with library staff guidance. You will be informed via School Cues after library visits so that you can share in your child(ren)'s joy of reading by reviewing selections with them and engaging in comprehension conversations.

WalkAbouts

Children at this age are in a need to explore the work around them. We cater to this need by

providing periodic walkabouts around our local community. A blanket permission slip will need to be signed.

Aftercare

Our school offers Aftercare for an additional fee. The Aftercare program begins at 2:30 and ends promptly at 5:30.

The Aftercare program is designed to follow the Montessori philosophy while offering the children more opportunities to relax and unwind in a comforting environment at the end of the school day. Your children's teachers and assistants do not lead the Aftercare program, although your child may use his/her classroom during the aftercare program with their aftercare teachers. Should you have questions about your child's day during school hours (8-2:30) please direct those questions to your child's teacher via email or face to face.

From 2:30-5:30, weather permitting, the Aftercare staff and children will be located within the outside areas attached to their particular classrooms. Pick up times for Aftercare are 4:00 and 5:30. The last pick up time for Aftercare is promptly at 5:30. Enter through the front gate and walk back to the Elementary space. Make sure to collect all personal items and sign out before leaving campus with your child at the end of the day.

Toys

Toys (including legos and Pokemon cards) may NOT be brought to school or stored in cubbies. The Children's School prides itself in providing authentic Montessori materials to engage and motivate the children to use their hands in purposeful and productive ways while on campus; not requiring any other types of materials, especially toys. Teachers will ask children to return the toys to their caregivers before they leave campus at drop off. We ask that parents help facilitate this policy by encouraging their children to leave all items from home either at home or in the car. If a toy does make it onto campus, which may happen, the teacher will help the child to separate from the toy and the item will be placed in the office. It then becomes the responsibility of the family to retrieve the item keeping in mind that the items collected in the office will be periodically discarded after a period of time.

Sunscreen and Bug Spray

Please apply bug spray and sunscreen to your child, if needed, before arriving at school. The staff is not permitted to apply either unless a medication and ointment release form has been filled out in the office and the materials have been provided by the caregivers.

School Work Pay

Throughout the year, we will put items on our classroom wish list that can contribute to your Work Pay. This could include purchasing items for the classroom or doing projects for

the classroom. Please feel free to ask your teacher throughout the year if there is anything that you can build or provide the classroom to count towards your work pay requirement. Make sure to record the hours/money spent in the Work Pay Binder located in the front office.

What To Bring For the Elementary Program

Please make sure everything is labeled with child's first and last name. Items to bring in daily are:

1. Water bottle
2. Snack
3. Lunch
4. Optional: Hat or sunglasses or both.
5. Optional: Toothbrush/toothpaste/hairbrush.
6. Optional: Running shoes/rain boots/ jacket.

I have received the Montessori Children's School of Key West, Inc. Elementary Program Handbook and agree to abide by all of the policies and procedures.

Printed Name

_____/____/____
Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

Printed Name

_____/____/____
Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

***SIGN AND RETURN THIS LAST PAGE WITH ENROLLMENT PAPERWORK**