



Upper Elementary Program Handbook

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The Montessori Method.....	3
Elementary Student Characteristics.....	4
The Prepared Environment.....	5
Upper Elementary Daily Rhythm.....	6
Arriving on Time/Drop-Off.....	6
Pick-up.....	7
Late Drop-off/Early Pick-up/ Illness/Appointments.....	7
Aftercare.....	7
Food.....	8
Snack.....	8
Examples of Food Choices for Snack.....	8
Sharing Food.....	8
Lunch.....	9
Eco-conscious Packaging.....	9
Appropriate Clothing.....	9
Birthday Celebrations.....	9
Communication.....	10
Conferences.....	11
Field Trips/Learning Expeditions.....	11
Library Trips.....	11
Learning Expeditions.....	12
Toys.....	12
Sunscreen, Bug Spray, Medication.....	13
School Work Pay.....	13
What To Bring For the Elementary Program.....	13

*The Upper Elementary Program Handbook is a SUPPLEMENT to the Parent/Student Handbook for policies specific to Upper Elementary. Refer to the Parent/Student Handbook for school-wide policies and procedures.

Pay careful attention to the AGGRESSIVE/DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR POLICY (with modified language for the second plane of development) and our ILLNESS AND INJURY GUIDELINES, as well as our updated FOOD ALLERGY POLICY.

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.

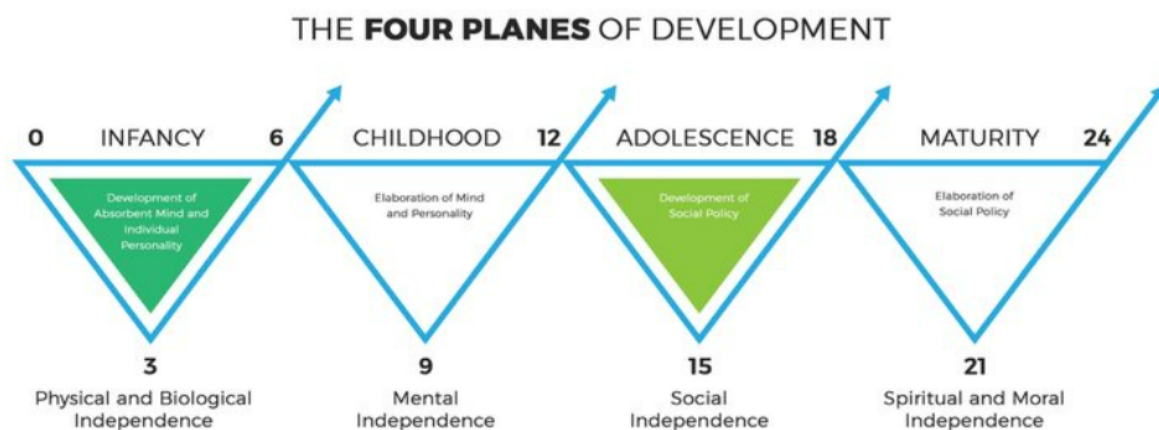
It is a view of the child as one who is naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared learning environment. It is an approach that values the human spirit and the development of the whole child—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive.

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, a full complement of specially designed Montessori learning materials is 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 to apply 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.

Elementary Student Characteristics

The Second Plane of Development, ages 6–12, is the age of “Conscious Imagination,” whose hallmarks include:

- ❖ Abstraction and imagination
- ❖ Morality and justice
- ❖ Culture
- ❖ Peer/social interactions

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.

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 expectations 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 consciousness becomes “keener”; they develop better ideas of right and wrong, and they often seem to have a better understanding of rules and regulations.
11. Hero worship is characteristic of this stage.
12. They can have enormous potential of intellect and power of imagination in this stage.

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 developmental tendencies shared by all children.

- **Exploration:** Within the environment are developmental materials such as impressionist posters, experiments, exercises, and activities such as dissection, microscope use, and research. In the external environment, there is contact with nature, and contact with society occurs through "Going Out." In other words, exploration is the tendency that helps us know and understand the world and answer all its questions.
- **Orientation:** Physically, this allows for location in time and space both inside and outside the environment. On a psychological and emotional level, orientation is based on boundaries, which are the rules of behaviour for healthy coexistence based on respect, responsibility, and the achievement of freedom and independence. But it is also found in the order and sequence of materials on the shelves. It is clear that when giving a presentation, this tendency is being used along with observation so that the child can see how to work with the material and, through repetition, achieve learning.
- **Order:** This tendency is what will give the child the internal structure necessary to function adequately in any life situation. It is the foundation that will allow them to classify the experiences they have inside and outside the environment. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain order in the environment, establish routines, and take responsibility for the care of the environment, including their belongings.
- **Communication:** This tendency provides the opportunity to build a bond with people, in addition to fostering the sharing of ideas, feelings, and opinions, and, above all, understanding that it is the basis of socialisation, which is one of the characteristics of children between 6 and 12 years old.
- **Work:** This is the opportunity to develop skills to be productive and to achieve independence and freedom. It is through the manipulation of materials that children will achieve learning through their own efforts, doing things for themselves while following their internal guidance.
- **Repetition, accuracy, and refinement:** These support the development of the mathematical mind, which is the logical and analytical part of the mind, which follows a process of starting from the concrete to achieve abstraction. It is also understood that through the use of developmental materials, learning is a personal achievement that fosters intellectual development.

- **Spirituality:** Spirituality is the essence of being human, so we need to understand that spiritual development is a process of searching, self-knowledge, connectivity, and maturation, which fosters personal growth and the development of one's life purpose.
- **Belonging:** This is the achieving of adaptation and integration of individuality into the community in which one lives, based on respect and acceptance.

We can conclude that meeting the needs of children aged 6 to 12, utilising their human characteristics and tendencies, is contained in what Maria and Mario Montessori called Cosmic Education, whose purpose goes beyond the connectivity of all that exists. The deeper purpose is to strengthen the essence of the child, making them aware that everything in nature has a purpose for existing, including them. ([Credit to Carmela Fierro, AMI 6-12 Trainer](#)).

Upper Elementary Daily Rhythm

8:00 Arrival at United Street Gate, Plan the Day, Morning Meeting
 9:00 Work Cycle
 12:00 Lunch
 12:30 Recess
 1:00 Enrichments/Work Cycle/Jobs
 2:45 Dismissal

Arriving on Time/Drop-Off

Your child's day begins PROMPTLY at 8:15, but students may arrive after 7:30, when staff are present.

- They will enter through the back door of 1021 White Street. This door is located off of Virginia Street.
- If your child rides a bike or a scooter, they will need to bring a lock and wear a helmet.
- Students may walk.
- If you would like to drop your child off, you must park in a **legal parking spot, not FAUSTOS or along the yellow curb**. You may allow your child to walk from your parked vehicle to school independently, or you may walk them to the back door area.
- We highly recommend you do a practice run before the first day of school, so you can look for open legal parking spots and help your child visualize this new process.

We can not stress this enough; YOU MUST PARK TO DROP OFF YOUR CHILD OR PICK UP YOUR CHILD ON WHITE STREET. Do not pull up at a stoplight and let them jump out.

*It is imperative to arrive at school on time, before 8:15. This allows children to plan

their day, acclimate, and socialize before the start of their workday. Our morning meeting begins promptly at 8:30, with lessons and work cycle immediately following. Children who arrive late find it difficult to adjust and transition because they have missed key elements of their daily schedule. If you arrive after the doors are locked, you or your student will need to ring the doorbell for entry.

Pick-up

Your child's day ends PROMPTLY at 2:45.

- If you are picking your child up at the White Street Campus, you must park in a legal parking spot, not FAUSTOS or along the yellow curb. You will need to come to the back area of 1021 White Street at the end of the day for pick-up or arrange a meeting location with your child, so they can be dismissed to walk to your vehicle.
- If your child uses aftercare, a staff member will walk students over to the Varela Street Campus at the end of their school day.
- If your child has not been promptly picked up by 2:50 and you have not communicated with your child's teacher, he/she will be sent to aftercare.
- A Google Form will go out at the beginning of each school year to inform staff of your plans. Communication is imperative to student safety.

Late Drop-off/Early Pick-up/ Illness/Appointments

In the event of a late drop-off or early pick-up, reach out directly to your child's teacher. Ring the Ring Doorbell (located at the back entrance) to silently alert the teachers of your arrival.

Aftercare

Our school offers Aftercare for an additional fee. The Aftercare program, located at the Varela Street Campus, 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.

The Aftercare staff and children will be located outside the Lower Elementary area or on the front lawn. The last pick up time for Aftercare is promptly at 5:30. Enter through the front gate and walk back to the Lower Elementary space. Make sure to collect all personal items and sign out before leaving campus.

Food

We do not restrict what your child eats during snack and 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. Children in Upper Elementary should be packing their own lunches, with your oversight.

Consider the Montessori philosophy as it applies to packaging. Remember to always reduce waste, reuse items, and send recyclable materials in cases when you cannot do the other two. We also practice composting, so be sure to engage in conversation with your child as to whether they have enough to eat or are generating too much food waste.

Snack

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 at the beginning of the year. 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, muffins, tortilla chips, cereal, veggie sticks, pita bread

Dairy: Yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese

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

Sharing Food

While students in the lower grades are asked not to share food or snacks, children at this plane of development are exploring their identity and learning how to be members of the society in which they live. Communal eating and sharing of food correlate to feelings of inclusion and bonding through developing trust and deepening connection. Our students should be clear on food sensitivities and allergies, as well as family preferences, and make their own informed decisions about when to participate in sharing and self-regulating food intake. This is an opportunity to exercise freedom within responsibility.

Lunch

Please include a clean fabric napkin with your child's lunch. Utensils and dishes are provided. In an effort to practice grace and courtesy, students will unpack their lunch onto plates/dishes. Compartmented lunch containers meant to be eaten out of will not be utilized. We do not provide refrigeration for lunch boxes; therefore, include an ice pack inside the lunchbox if needed. A microwave is available for short reheating (1 minute or less). A toaster, toaster oven, and hot water pot are also available.

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

pack their own lunch boxes so they are clear on what is meant for when.

Eco-conscious Packaging

Montessori lunches pair perfectly with eco-conscious packaging that emphasizes zero-waste and fosters child independence. The best materials are stainless steel, food-grade silicone, and beeswax wraps, which eliminate single-use plastics and are durable enough to handle daily use.

Appropriate Clothing

While fictional, fantasy, or superhero character clothing is strongly discouraged in the lower grades, Montessori Students in the Upper Elementary program are exploring their identity and expressing themselves through their clothing choices. So long as clothing is school-appropriate and not a distraction from learning, their choices should be fine. Infractions will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, with administrative leadership having the final word.

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. The class will sing, and the birthday child will walk around the sun. Students will ask the birthday child questions about her/his life so far to honor them. E.g., If you could live anywhere, where would it be? Your favorite thing to do with each member of your family?

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.

Communication

We believe that the exchange of information and open communication are 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 weekly 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 and lessons/work updates via Montessori Compass. 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.

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.

Since open communication is essential, I cultivate a community in which my students speak up and advocate for themselves. If they bring concerns to you, encourage them to engage in open dialog with me, either in person, in writing, or via email.

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. Refrain from communicating about your child in front of your child or other 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, preferably in writing, including email or text, to be sure I do not forget and can fully attend to our conversation.

I cannot promise to check email or use my phone during the school day, but I will check it before and after school and while students attend enrichment activities, between the hours of 7:30 am and 4:00 pm.

I will get back to you within 24 hours, even if I cannot immediately answer your concerns or resolve the issue.

If important information must be relayed to your child or your child's teacher during the school day and you cannot reach me, you should call or text the office at 305-294-5302.

Most of my communication with you will be via email or text cues, so be sure to request a hard copy if you'd prefer.

If your family is experiencing difficulties at home, I would like to provide additional support at school. I understand that you are not always able to share details, and that is okay. If your child is coming to school after a difficult night, morning, or weekend, please email me or send a note saying, "Handle with Care." Nothing else will be said or asked. This will let me know that your child may need extra time, patience, or assistance during the day.

Conferences

The Elementary students conduct two student-led conferences a year. Montessori is a Constructivist Learning Philosophy, which dictates that learners actively build their own knowledge through experiences and interactions, rather than passively receiving information. This meeting with you is paramount. 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 before and shared during the student-led conference. Parents are welcome to share in the goal-setting process.

We also hold two parent/teacher conferences for teachers, caregivers, and (optionally) students, to get together in a casual, comfortable, face-to-face setting to discuss your child's progress and development. This conference is NOT REQUIRED, but rest assured, I will let you know if I believe we need to meet following student-led conferences, and you should do the same.

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. Don't wait for conferences; if you have a concern, communicate immediately, and I'll do the same.

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.

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 **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.

Learning Expeditions

Children at this age need to explore the world around them. A blanket permission slip covers any walking trips within a mile of campus, planned or unplanned. Learning Expeditions happen weekly. Any that go beyond a mile will necessitate taking the city bus for \$1 each way. These trips will be planned, and a permission slip will go out to pre-collect the bus money and obtain your signature and initials for each trip. These slips go out in the fall and spring. Sometimes trips may shift days or times to accommodate weather or schedule changes.

Toys

Toys may NOT be brought to school or stored in cubbies. The Children's School prides itself on 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. Fidget "toys" that become a distraction will be removed by the teacher and returned at the end of the day.

Sunscreen, Bug Spray, Medication

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 release form has been filled out and the materials have been provided by the caregivers. To administer all medication, over-the-counter or prescribed, you must submit a signed medical waiver (located in the front office or requested electronically).

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 to 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. Please see the Parent/Student handbook for details.

What To Bring For the Elementary Program

Please make sure everything is labeled with the child's first and last name.

1. Water bottle (labeled)
2. Snack
3. Lunch including a clean fabric napkin
4. Optional: Hat, sunglasses, or both
5. Optional: Toothbrush/toothpaste/hairbrush can be stored in personal cubby
6. Weather-appropriate clothing

I have received the Montessori Children's School of Key West, Inc., Upper 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 TO THE OFFICE WITH ENROLLMENT PAPERWORK**