



Family Handbook

2011 - 2012

Montessori Children's House

2400 Division Street South
Northfield, MN 55705
507-645-2445

Welcome to Montessori Children's House

The Montessori Philosophy

Maria Montessori believed that the most important period for education is not the age of university studies, but the period from birth to age six. This is the period when the intelligence itself is being formed. The Montessori preprimary classroom is prepared to be an ideal environment for young children: suited to the inherent needs of three to six year olds. More so than striving for academic accomplishments, we help the children develop powers of deliberation, self-initiative and independent thinking. Once developed, if nurtured properly, these will remain life-long tendencies.

Montessori Children's House focuses on the child's abilities and independence. We offer areas of language, mathematics, science, geography, foreign languages, art, music, sensorial and practical life. Our spacious grounds encourage nature exploration and respect for the environment.

We feel that the goal of early childhood education should not be to fill the child with facts from a pre-selected course of studies, but rather to cultivate his own periods and readiness. We know that the hand is the chief teacher of the child, and that in order to learn there must be concentration. The best way a child can concentrate is by fixing his attention on some task he is performing with his hands. Montessori said that the hand is the tentacle for the soul. Everything from our sensorial and practical life to our math and language allows the child to concentrate and absorb information from the materials through his hands and each of his senses rather than being taught solely by hearing and watching.

We encourage independence through order. From the time your child arrives, he will find the school a place of order and respect. He will be working with real tools and real-life equipment, not just toy imitations, which all too often break, depriving a child of independence. By handling beautiful and real objects, the child will learn respect for his environment.

In the classroom, we never do for a child what the child can do for himself. A dependent child is a demanding child. We maintain order to establish independence. We do not underestimate the abilities of children by doing for them; rather we give them opportunities to take on responsibility. When we as adults give service to children who are able to do things for themselves we are in effect saying, "You are too small, too lacking in judgment." We may feel we are giving when we act for the child; actually, we are taking away the child's right to learn and develop.

Montessori Children's House Non-Discrimination Policy

Montessori Children's House admits students of any race, religion, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to all students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of its education policies, admissions and hiring procedures, scholarship and loan programs, or any other school-administered programs.

History of the School

Montessori Children's House was founded in the centenary year of Montessori education—2007. The two acre property, with a small farm-like atmosphere, was developed to offer the young child a comfortable and stimulating microcosm of the world. Two classrooms were created from the existing home on the property with the unique characteristics of the Montessori environment in mind. The inaugural year was served by one classroom and in its second year MCH grew to accommodate children in both classrooms. Healthy enrollment has followed with the result of a lively and engaged school community.

School Organization

Welcome! We would like to take this opportunity to welcome our new families to the 2011-2012 school year. You are now part of the Montessori Children's House community.

PRACTICAL MATTERS: Policies for Routines at School

Daily Schedule

School hours Monday through Friday:

Half-Day 8:15 am to 11:15am for classroom 2 (hereafter in parentheses) or 8:30 am to 11:30 am for classroom 1

Extended Day (8:15) 8:30am to 2:30 pm

Full Day (8:15)8:30 am to 3:30 pm

Before School Care 7:30 am to 8:15 am

After School Care until 4:30 pm

The school's door will open at 7:30 am. Children arriving before (8:05) 8:20 am will go into the Before School Care program. Children should arrive between (8:05 and 8:15) 8:20 am and 8:30 am for the classroom.

Children may be picked up between (11:15 and 11:25) 11:30 and 11:40 for half-day, or 2:30 to 2:40 for extended day. If you will be late to pick up your child, please call the school and ask if your child may join After School Care. All children must be picked up by 4:40 pm.

Attendance and Promptness

Children have a great need for consistency and order in their daily lives. Consistency in attendance helps children develop a positive attitude toward their work and also helps them develop social skills and a greater sense of community. In order to benefit fully from the Montessori environment, it is important that your child come to school every day. Arrange your morning routine to give your child plenty of time to get ready for school. A relaxed and predictable preparation time helps children arrive at school happy and eager to learn. Please help your child arrive on time each day. You may bring your child as early as 7:30 am, and all children should begin arriving at (8:05) 8:20 am. It is important not to be late because your child may feel left out if the class has already started when he or she arrives. In addition, late arrivals tend to disrupt the class. Whether your child's day ends at 11:30, 2:30, 3:30, or 4:30 pm, please pick up your child on time. Children become anxious when their parent is late. There will be a late penalty charge of \$1.00 per minute for children picked up after 4:40 pm.

Arrival and Drop off Procedures

Due to the increase of traffic that we bring to our location, our morning drop off procedure expedites the process for everyone and keeps good relations with our neighbors.

Please read carefully the following arrival procedures.

When bringing your child from 7:30 am, but before 8:05 am, please park in the parking lot and walk your child into the downstairs foyer. You may ensure your child has put items away in his/her cubby. Please remain with your child until the staff in the foyer greets your child.

From (8:05 to 8:15) 8:20 to 8:30 am: This is the general arrival time. Following this drop-off procedure will help everyone: Pull up to the front of the school alongside the front entrance. A staff person will be there to assist your child in getting out of the car. Make sure your child has his or her belongings ready to go. Say a quick goodbye to your child and then drive on. A staff member will escort your child into the building. If your child is unduly distressed or experiences difficulties in getting out of the car, please pull over and park and walk your child to the staff person at the drop-off area. Say goodbye to your child, and leave, even if your child seems distraught. The staff is experienced and well trained in helping children make the transition to school. If traffic at the drop-off begins to back up slightly, please make sure you are not blocking any of our neighbor's driveways. Prepare your child for the morning procedure by discussing it with him or her. Telling your child exactly what will occur at the drop-off and what is expected will be reassuring. In time, the drop-off will be familiar and comfortable for your child. Parents will soon feel that the drop-off in the morning really does help the day begin with fewer struggles for the parent and child. We appreciate your cooperation in helping to simplify this very busy time.

If your child is having trouble with the drop off, you are welcome to walk him or her inside.

Explain that just for this day you will come inside the building and help with the lunch box and

cubby. Wait for a staff person to greet your child in the entryway. Please avoid entering the classroom in the morning, as it is disruptive to the other children, and actually may prolong your child's adjustment period. Often it is the parent having difficulty-saying goodbye, and your child will sense this and manifest it for you! Children usually quickly dry their tears and get involved once they settle into the classroom. A staff member will call you in the unlikely event that there really is a problem with your child adjusting to the classroom.

Pick up time: Follow the same procedure as in the morning and a staff member will bring your child to you. If your child would like to show you something, on occasion, you may of course park in the lot and come into the classroom. Please be especially aware that if you pick up your child at (11:15) 11:30, class is still continuing for other children, and perhaps a later time would be better for your short visit.

Children must be accompanied by an adult at all times.

Children may not leave the building without an adult!

If someone else is to drop off or pick up your child, make sure he or she understands the procedures. We ask that you inform the staff when your child will be picked up by any of the people listed so they can make the transition smooth for your child. It is helpful to bring the person and introduce him/her to the staff ahead of time. Remember that your child will only be released to an individual preauthorized on your release form, unless otherwise notified. Please send a note if someone not on your registration form will pick up your child. Identification may be required so make sure the person comes prepared to present ID if the staff does not already recognize him or her. This is, of course, for your child's safety. Following these procedures will avoid awkward situations for the child, the staff and your family and friends. Phone authorization to release your child is discouraged: however, we realize that it may be necessary in an emergency. If you need to leave a message on the school answering machine, the staff will call you back at the home or work phone number listed on your child's registration form. This is another way we can try to ensure your child's safety.

Communications

Phone calls to members of the teaching staff are best made between 7:30am-8:00 am, 11:30am- 12:30pm, and 2:30 pm-3:30 pm. You may also send a written note, e-mail, or leave a telephone message. You will be contacted as soon as possible. Notes for the staff can be given to the morning greeter at the drop-off area.

Weather Closures

*If inclement weather forces closure of the school for a day, we will follow the Northfield Public School closures. *Note: Days missed due to weather are not made up.*

Clothing

Please send your child to school in casual clothing that will not restrict his/her activities. When clothes are tight, it restricts the child's freedom of movement, when clothes are too large it interferes with their ability to manipulate materials gracefully and their movements are hindered and clumsy. This also pertains to footwear. Your child needs to wear clothing that can be put on and taken off easily by him/her. It will help your child's growing sense of independence if he or she can use the bathroom without having to ask an adult for help with clothing. The easiest to manage clothes include elastic-waist knit pants, low shoes (slip-ons or Velcro), and clothing with manageable front fasteners. Buckles and ties do provide learning opportunities when the child can manage them. Please practice with them at home. Clothes that seem particularly difficult for young children to manage include high-top tennis shoes, boots, overalls, and tight-waist jeans with zippers and snaps. Keep in mind that school clothes will sometimes get paint, dirt, or food on them. Also, children will need to wear clothing for playing outside in all kinds of weather. Please choose clothing or accessories that will not be distracting to your child or to their classmates.

Bathroom Habits

Make sure that your child knows how to use a toilet and toilet paper. At times a child will have difficulties with bathroom hygiene or not be able to manage clothing. Our staff will offer some help with children in the bathroom, but independence is our goal. If your child has special needs in this area, please discuss them with your child's teacher.

Immunizations

Students must have an immunization record on file with the school. Unless your child meets exemption requirements, they must be considered "up-to date" or "complete" by September 1, 2011.

Illness

Children who show signs of illness should not be in school. This is for your child's health as well as that of all the other families in our school community. Children should not be in school if they have one of the following symptoms:

- *Fever over 101 degrees. Children should be free of fever at least 24 hours before returning to school.*
- *Diarrhea (more than one abnormally loose stool per day)*
- *Vomiting*
- *Nausea*
- *Sever cough*
- *Sore throat*

- Unusual yellow color to skin or eyes
- Skin or eye lesion or rashes that are severe, weeping, or puss-filled
- Stiff neck and headache with one or more of the symptoms listed above
- Difficult breathing or wheezing
- Complaints of severe pain
- Communicable diseases including head lice, scabies, etc., which require treatment

Children who are or who become sick at school will be sent home. Likewise, any child who is not well enough to play outside is not well enough to come to school. If you feel your child is not well enough to go outside, then he/she should stay home, as all children will go outside as scheduled. If your child will be absent, please call to advise the school of the absence. If your child contracts a contagious disease such as chicken pox, measles, pin worms, impetigo, pink eye, etc., report it to the staff immediately. The other families will be notified of the symptoms. No mention will be made of the child's name. We follow Health Department Guidelines regarding contagious diseases. If your child becomes ill during school, either you or an authorized contact person will be notified to pick up your child. Children will feel more secure about this situation if you have previously discussed with them where they will be taken and by whom, should they become ill. In case of extreme medical emergency, if you cannot be reached, your child will be taken to the nearest facility for treatment. We will make every effort to reach you and let you know the nature of the emergency and what actions have been taken. Permission to Transport Form is included in the registration packet to assist in gaining emergency help for your child. The treating physician will make treatment decisions concerning your child's care, if we are unable to locate you. Please be sure yours is on file in the office and keep it updated.

Medication

School staff will only administer prescribed medication or "over the counter" medications or vitamins with written authorization. If your child needs medication **DO NOT SEND IT WITH THE CHILD**. Give it directly to the staff so that it may be safely stored until it needs to be administered. All prescription medication must be in the original prescription bottle or container clearly labeled with the child's name, the drug, the dosage, and the name of the prescribing doctor. If the child is to take medication at home also, the druggist can issue the medication in two separate containers. Over-the-counter medication (including vitamins) should be in its original bottle, and also labeled with the name of the child, the drug, and the dosage.

Snacks

The School serves snacks each day to students, one mid-morning and one or two in the afternoon. Snacks consist of protein, carbohydrate and a fruit or vegetable. Please make sure the staff is aware of any allergies or dietary restrictions.

Lunches

These lunch guidelines are extremely important for all students. They allow the child an important opportunity to develop their will and gain independence! All children attending school past 11:30 will have lunch at school, and parents are responsible for providing their child's lunch. The focus of lunch should be a nutritious, well-balanced meal with appropriate social graces. Any uneaten foods will be sent home in the lunch bag so that you are aware of which foods are eaten and in what quantity. All foods should be sent in re-sealable containers. Practice with your child to ensure he or she can easily open and close the containers. This will increase the child's sense of confidence and independence. Children should bring their own tableware when needed. Napkins will be provided in the classroom, but your child may wish to bring a special placemat and cloth napkin from home.

Lunch guidelines and examples

Lunches should include:

1. A protein-rich food:

- A Sandwich – peanut butter, almond butter, cheese, tuna, egg salad, etc.*
- Cheese – a hunk or slices*
- Nuts – peanuts, cashews, almonds, etc., alone, or with raisins, sunflower seeds, etc.*
- Peanut Butter – in celery sticks or stuffed in an apple*
- Cottage cheese or cheese or cheese spread – in celery sticks, cucumber boats,*
- Tuna salad or egg salad – in celery sticks, cucumber boats, squash boats or wrapped in a lettuce leaf*
- Chicken, turkey or other meat, in cubes, slices, or hunks*
- Meat loaf slices*
- Hard cooked eggs (shelled if appropriate)*
- Plain yogurt*

Luncheon meats, beef jerky, hot dogs, etc. contain nitrates and preservatives, and are highly salted, so should be used in moderation, or as a change of pace.

A note on sandwiches: A sandwich is usually 60 % bread, so it is important to use nutritious bread. Whole – wheat or whole- grained breads are the best choices because all the “enrichment” is there naturally. (Remember, if it says “enriched”, it only means the manufactures have put back some of the nutritive elements that were processed out.) Crackers can provide grain food, and variety, when you don't pack a sandwich.

2. A Vegetable:

Carrot sticks Celery Sticks Cherry tomatoes

Tomato wedges Squash slices Snow peas/beans

Mushrooms Green pepper strips Turnips

Pickles Olives Salads

Cucumbers Jicama Broccoli

Brussels sprouts Cauliflower Spinach

3. A Fruit:

Fruit can be fresh, canned, or dried, depending on the fruit, and season.

Apple Applesauce Peaches

Orange -quartered Banana Seedless grapes

Nectarine Apricots Mandarin-orange

Blueberries Melons Pears

Tangerine Pineapple Raisins

4. Something Special:

For children with larger appetites:

Popcorn Graham Crackers Pretzels

Bagels Granola Bars Trail mix

Sharing

Children occasionally like to bring interesting items to share with the class. One of the main purposes of sharing is to help children express themselves verbally. You can help your child prepare to tell the class about what he/she has brought. Let him/her take the lead: Ask him/her what they want to say. Help him/her figure out a simple, logical way to say it. Don't give more information than she/he can absorb. Please help your child make a good choice before he/she arrives at school with the item to be shared to avoid possible embarrassment or disappointment.

These are very appropriate things to bring:

- *Something your child has made*
- *Something natural your child has found (rocks, shells, leaves)*
- *Items from other cultures*
- *Interesting pictures, posters, newspaper articles*
- *Photos of family members, homes, vacations, etc.*
- *Books, especially those depicting a real-life situation. One at a time, please. You may mark their favorite page.*
- *Animal specimen. If live, you should accompany your child, or it should be released back into its environment at the end of the day.*

Please do not allow your child to bring toys (including Lego types), trading cards, knives, and watches with media characters or disruptive sounds, money, or candy to school. These items are distracting or dangerous and will be confiscated for the day.

Birthdays, Invitations, and Thank You Cards

Birthdays are an important holiday to a small child. It is his or her own special day. In celebrating this event in the classroom, we want to portray a birthday as a milestone in time and indication of the child's growth. We ask parents to provide photos of your child at birth and each year of age. These photos are shared as part of the birthday ceremony at a group gathering. Parents are welcome to attend the birthday ceremony. Check with your child's teacher to schedule a time. If you are sending cards, invitations or other such items, please be sensitive of the feelings of the children who are not participants. We ask that you do not hand

out invitations or pick up invited children at the school. Please use the US Postal Service or email

for invitations. We ask that this is taken care of outside of school for the respect of others. Thank you cards should also be distributed in the same manner.

Before School Care

Children who need to arrive before 8:05am will be a part of the Before School Care. The staff will help the children make their transition to the school day through reading, quiet activities, and /or helping with the preparation of the classrooms for the day. Your child may bring a suitable breakfast to eat at this time. BSC is charged on a flat fee basis.

After School Care

In recognition of the realities of our present day two-income family world, we provide after school care for the children of working parents who would otherwise need to be transported to another caregiver after the class is over.

Children in this program will have a rest period (unless they are in Extended Day), participate in planned activities such as cooking, gardening, nature studies, arts and crafts, sewing, music, and creative dramatics. In addition, children will have individual time to read, create, think, and play. The Montessori philosophy of respect and space for individual growth and development will be integral to all activities in the program. An afternoon snack will be provided, and the children may elect to finish any uneaten food from their lunch box. Parents should provide a small quilt or blanket for their child. Other comfort items, such as a pillow and favorite stuffed animal, may be brought for naptime use. Pillow and blanket will be taken home monthly for washing.

THE BIGGER PICTURE: Operations and Philosophy

Discipline Policy

A major goal of the Montessori classroom is to help the child develop self-discipline. We attempt to provide an environment that both physically and psychologically fosters self-discipline. The freedom of choice the child has in the classroom also has limits and responsibilities. The basic ground rule of the School is respect. The children are taught daily to show respect for other children, for the adults, for the materials and for themselves. No child may hurt another in any way and no child may disturb the work of others. When children are having difficulties, a variety of methods are used to help them regain self-control. The child may be redirected to another activity or be asked to move to a table where there are fewer distractions. The children are taught techniques of conflict resolution, but while these are developing in the child, an adult may mediate disputes between children. The appropriate behavior is explained in a positive way. Children who are having many difficulties may be asked to remain with an adult or asked to sit out from the group until they have regained their composure. In the case of ongoing behavioral problems, the child's parents will be called in for a conference and a plan of action agreed upon with the teacher, if appropriate. Parents may be asked to consult with an outside professional for behavioral or learning difficulties that cannot be handled within the context of the classroom, or which are beyond the scope of the staff's training. Continued violent or

disruptive behavior will need to be addressed by the parents in a focused manner. In the rare

event that the behaviors continue without improvement, the child may be suspended from school for a time, or the parents may be asked to find another situation for the child.

Learning about Montessori Education

You and your child can receive the greatest benefit from Montessori education if you understand its principles and their application. Parent nights are held during the school year to provide opportunities for you to become better acquainted with the staff, to learn more about Montessori education and to get to know other parents. As the staff and parents join together in these opportunities, a bond of understanding, communication and mutual support develops. We encourage and look forward to your participation. If you would like to read about the philosophy and method of Montessori education, feel free to check out books or magazines from our Parent Library.

Classroom Work

Children from 3 to 6 years of age are process oriented, not product oriented. In the classroom, children are encouraged at all times to work for their own satisfaction, and not just to have something to take home each day for the parent. Papers are collected every day and sorted at the end of the week. A selection of work may be sent home at intervals. Some work is kept for the child's file at school. Responding to your child's work in a positive way with more general statements (e.g. "You worked hard on this", "you made a design", "you used a lot of blue", etc.) Rather than heaping praise or asking for an explanation, will aid the child in developing true self-expression.

Parent Conferences

Regular parent conferences occur in the fall and spring. Dates for conferences are noted on the school calendar. Sign-up sheets will be posted prior to these days to schedule a time for your conference. You will get more out of the conference if you can observe your child in the classroom first. Contact the office to make an appointment to observe the classroom. It is most beneficial for parents and the staff to establish and maintain an open channel of communication. You are encouraged to meet with the teachers at any time during the year.

Observing in the Classroom

Parents are encouraged to observe the classroom at work. This is the best way to learn about the practical side of Montessori education, as well as to become familiar with the kinds of activities that your child is involved in every day. Children are generally proud to show parents their special environment. While parents may visit the school at any time, we ask that you make an appointment in advance with your child's teacher. There is an "observer's chair" in the classroom where you may sit. The children know that your "work" as an observer is to watch them, and that the observer is not to be disturbed. Please respect the children's work by sitting quietly and not engaging children in too much conversation.

Transition to Extended Day

Children will exhibit certain developmental signs when they are ready to move from half-day to Extended Day. Generally, children are ready when they near or reach their 5th birthday, can concentrate for long periods of time, are able to work on projects cooperatively, and want to hold over work from one day to the next. Readiness for Extended Day should be discussed with the teacher. The transition may take place at any time during the school year.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is crucial in the operation of MCH for many reasons: it is important for children to see their parents taking an active role in their school, it builds a sense of community, and it keeps tuition as low as possible. Parents often ask how they can help out at the school, and there are several ways. Please contact the office or your child's teacher for more volunteer information.

Montessori at Home

Your children are one of life's greatest gifts. Enjoy them. Share your life and your home with them. Encourage children to participate with the care of the home – cleaning, gardening, repair work, preparation for celebrations and festivals. Organize your home so that there is place for children in each room, which sends children the message that they are valued. It can be as simple as having low hooks for hanging up small garments, a small table and chair so there is furniture that fits them. Make a partnership with the school to enrich your parenting and relationship with your child. If you can apply Montessori principles at home, your child will be able to continue the growth that begins at school. Attend parent nights at the school.

The staff of the school can be valuable resources in your advantage. Following are some age appropriate suggestions for applying Montessori principles in your home.

Primary ages 3 to 6-Children under 6 years of age are in a stage heightened to sensorial impressions, i.e., shape, size, color, taste, etc. Each object in the home is noticed at all times by them. The overall effect is that they “drink in” with a powerful “absorbent mind.” Know that the care and thought you put into the décor of your home is appreciated by your child. During this time the language sensitivity is especially strong. Children learn vocabulary at a phenomenal rate. Teach them the names of objects in your home, the names of the flowers in the garden, the places you visit, etc. They glory in the very sound of the language. If someone in your family speaks a foreign language, encourage that person to speak with your child. The ear then opens to the new system of speaking, and will never completely close. Children have heightened ability to imitate sounds; never again will it be so easy to make the sounds of a foreign language.

“Teach by teaching, not by correcting”, is one of the maxims of Montessori. If your child is having difficulty with an activity, he or she will be very sensitive concerning it and will need reassurance. You should demonstrate the activity using very slow movements so that they may be followed. Analyze such simple actions as closing a door, moving a chair, folding, etc., and your child will be grateful. Is your child's room too cluttered? The room should be very simple, with only as much in it as the child can keep order. “A place for everything and everything in its

place” is a useful maxim for your child's room. The bed should be low, so that the child can get

in and out without help. The cupboard should be low, and the shelves should hold a limited number of toys. If your child has too many toys, you may put some of them away, letting the child choose which go on the shelf to begin with. Rotate them periodically, again with the child's help. In this sensitive period for sensorial impressions, the artist's eye and the musician's ear are developed. Now is the time to play for your child the music you love, read the literature you love, and show the pictures that mean the most to you. Tell your children the names of the authors, artists and musicians, and they will remember. As music is played, mention the names of the instruments and they will remember. "Help Me Do It Myself" is the theme song of the young child. It is so strong that it may be the cause of some parent-child conflict. Watch for it at home and help your child to be as independent as possible in the areas of care of the person, care of the environment, and doing for others. Montessori stresses that the greatest obstacle to development is the well-meaning, over-helpful adult. The process of development of inner discipline, self-assurance, and preference for purposeful activity which takes place in children was called "normalization" by Montessori. It appeared to her, in fact, to be the normal state of the child, since it developed spontaneously when the environment offered the necessary means. Creating a home environment which fosters this development will benefit the whole family!

Reading for Parents (many titles are available in our Parent Library)

A Child in the Family, Maria Montessori.

Explanation of the common sense rationale behind the Montessori methods and reasons for its success.

The Secret of Childhood, Maria Montessori. The intelligence, psyche and work of the child.

Montessori, A Modern Approach, Paula Polk Lillard.

An introduction to the Montessori movement in education. A history and philosophy of the Montessori Method.

Montessori Today, Paula Polk Lillard.

Excellent work on the child's need from 3 through the Elementary years, and how the philosophy and practice of the classroom addresses those needs.

A Parent's Guide to the Montessori Classroom, Aline Wolf.

A detailed look at a 3-6 year old classroom with black and white photographs of children working with the Montessori materials.

Maria Montessori – Her Life and Her Work, E.M Standing.

A biography of Montessori as written by a friend and disciple. Photos of Montessori children at work in many countries of the world.

Endangered Minds, Jane Healy.

Groundbreaking work on the process of learning and thinking in the brain and the effects of cultural and environmental obstacles to children's intellectual growth.

The Pink WHAT?, Deede Stevenson.

Reference guide to the curriculum materials in the Primary classroom.