



HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS
2010-2011

WELCOME

Welcome to Williamsburg Montessori School. This *Handbook* explains how the school operates and outlines our official policies. It also presents guidelines, suggestions, and answers to questions that may arise throughout the year. At WMS Parents are essential partners in our mission to “nurture the child’s spirit.” We rely on your wisdom and commitment in helping us create the unique community that is WMS. We deeply value your participation in every facet of your child’s development and we invite you to join us on this exciting educational journey.

Please regard the policies and procedures outlined in the following pages as a starting point on that journey. The real work takes place between teachers and students, parents and teachers, and between parents and children. We, in turn, welcome your input. If you are a returning parent, we are pleased to welcome you back. If you are new to the school, we look forward to getting to know you.

Best wishes for a peaceful year of joyful learning.

Sandy

Sandy Andrews
Head of School

August, 2010

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A MONTESSORI EDUCATION

For more than a century the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori has flourished as a holistic and child-centered approach to human development, teaching practice, and social progress. Trained as a physician Dr. Montessori became committed to the education of young children, and envisioned school as a carefully designed, developmentally appropriate “home” for children. She named her school the *Casa dei Bambini*, or “Children’s House,” and she described the character of the school in terms of the activities and attitudes an observer might see were he or she to spend a morning in the *Casa*:

There are forty little beings—from three to seven years old, each one intent on his own work. One is going through the exercises for the senses; one is doing an arithmetical exercise; one is handling the letters, one is drawing, one is fastening and unfastening the pieces of cloth on the little wooden frames, still another is dusting.....There are muffled sounds of objects lightly moving about, of children tiptoeing. Once in a while comes a cry of joy only partly repressed, “Teacher! Teacher!” an eager call, “Look! See what I’ve done.” But as a rule, there is entire absorption in the work at hand.

Remarkably, observers who spend a morning in any one of our programs (Toddler, Children’s House, and Elementary) will witness a similar scene. The sight of children happily engrossed in “work” freely chosen, with minimal adult intervention is what draws thousands to the Montessori approach, making it the largest and most enduring educational movement throughout the world.

The Method

The Montessori Method follows a “whole child” approach, fostering not only cognitive skills but also social and emotional growth. Montessori classes span three age levels, and children stay with the same teacher, encouraging a sense of community and allowing teachers to develop those relationships and a deep understanding of the child’s learning style.

The Montessori teacher prepares the environment with aesthetically pleasing and developmentally appropriate multisensory materials to engage the children’s interest and guide them from concrete to abstract learning.

Long, uninterrupted work periods are provided during which the children choose from a wide range of activities and are able to learn at their own pace, both alone and in cooperative groups. The teacher is trained in careful observation so she is prepared to “follow the child” in his or her development.

To summarize, the method is a response to a universal plea among children: “I want to learn, but help me to do it myself.” Through carefully orchestrated experiences guided by physical and mental order, children acquire the inner discipline necessary to persist at their chosen tasks, to interact with the world respectfully, and to participate confidently in an increasingly complex world.

American Montessori Society

Enrolling your child at WMS means joining the American Montessori Society (AMS). Your membership in this organization helps guarantee AMS's high standards are maintained at WMS. All of our teachers have been trained at AMS/AMI accredited institutions, and we maintain an institutional affiliation, which requires 100 percent parent membership. The cost of this membership is approximately \$50.00 per family annually, and will be added to your first tuition payment.

A benefit of membership is the monthly publication *Montessori Life*. This journal is a helpful resource on the Montessori philosophy and its practical application, both at school and at home.

Further Reading

The WMS library contains a wide array of resources for parents interested in learning more about Montessori education. From professional journals to the works of Montessori herself to more generalized treatments of childhood, parenting, and learning, we invite you to visit our collection as one way of becoming more acquainted with the type of education your child is experiencing at WMS. Some recommendations include:

Books by Maria Montessori:

The Absorbent Mind

The Discovery of the Child

The Secret of Childhood

Education for a New World

Books Related to the Montessori Experience:

Children of the Universe, Michael Duffy

Maria Montessori, Rita Kramer

Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius, Angeline Stoll Lillard

Montessori: A Modern Approach, Paula Polk Lillard

The Hidden Hinge, Rosa Packard

WMS Mission Statement

WMS provides a daily living and learning environment for children where they can grow intellectually, socially, physically, and mentally in a structure governed by the Montessori philosophy. WMS prepares children aged 18 months through the adolescent years for a life-long learning and meaningful participation in a rapidly changing society. We aim to develop in each child the ability to solve problems, to use freedom wisely, to respect him/herself and others, and above all, to take joy in learning. WMS is committed to maintaining and enriching its high quality academic programs and activities to enable children to learn and develop.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Williamsburg Montessori School (WMS) was incorporated in August of 1982. It remains a non-profit corporation, open to children ages 18 months to twelve years of age without regard to race, creed, or national origin. WMS holds a certificate of affiliation from the American Montessori Society, and is licensed to provide child-care by the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Governance and Leadership

WMS is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors composed of current parents, alumni parents, grandparents, and members of the wider community. Its goal is to ensure effective, strategic and committed leadership enabling WMS to fulfill its mission. The Board hires, supervises and supports the Head of School. It establishes general policy, oversees long-range financial goals and provides continuity and direction for the school.

The WMS Board elects new directors and officers at the board's annual meeting each summer. Please contact the Chair of the Board for information related to the nominating process. A copy of the WMS bylaws and meeting minutes may be obtained in the main office. Issues to be presented for review by the Board must be submitted to the Chair prior to a meeting, with sufficient time for consideration. Board Meetings are held at 7:00 pm on the third Thursday of each month.

The Board encourages parent participation in the work of committees such as Board Development Committee, Facilities Committee, and Finance Committee.

The Head of School is the chief administrative officer of the school and leads the school in the areas of curriculum, personnel, financial management, internal relations, admissions and enrollment, program planning and development, external relations and capital development. The Head is the sole employee of Board of Directors and implements its general and financial policies. The Head leads the Administrative Team in carrying out WMS' Mission and in advancing the Strategic Plan. The Head of School is supported by the Assistant Head for Operations, the Registrar, and the Bursar.

Parent Commitment

Each WMS family is required to contribute a minimum of fifteen hours of service to the school each year the child is enrolled. If a family is unable to contribute this time, they have the option of contributing \$20.00 per hour, for a total of \$300.00 per year. For more on parent involvement, please refer to the section on *Being a Parent at WMS* in this *Handbook*.

Calendar

WMS is in session from September through mid June. We observe a two week winter vacation in December, the first full week in April for Spring Break, and two weeks in late August. We also close for the following holidays: Labor Day, Columbus Day, two days at Thanksgiving, New Year's Day, President's Day, Martin Luther King Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, and four teacher professional days during the year. School calendars are provided at the beginning of the school year, and the most recent calendar updates are posted on our web site at www.williamsburgmontessori.org.

Snow Days

In the event of severe weather WMS will close school when James City County School system is closed. On subsequent days of such weather WMS will make its own determination of the advisability of opening school. If schools open two hours late WMS will open at 9:30 a.m. for ALL programs. WMS will send an automated message to parents by phone in the case of delays or closings, as well as posting information on the following:

- www.williamsburgmontessori.org
- WMS phone line recorded message

ADMISSION AND ENROLLMENT

Applying to WMS

The WMS admissions season begins in October, when we schedule visits to the school. This exploratory session includes an introduction to our philosophy and expectations and a classroom observation. When openings are determined in February, new families will be contacted to arrange a visit for their child with the classroom directress. For toddlers and children aged 3-6, this meeting will last about ½ hour. Elementary children will be invited to spend the morning in the classroom during school hours.

After the visit, the Admissions Committee will review all materials received and, in consultation with the classroom Directress, make a decision about the appropriateness of the WMS program for the applicant. Once accepted, each family will have seven days to enroll by signing and returning an Enrollment Agreement and paying a deposit which is applied toward tuition. After seven days WMS will offer the opening to another candidate.

The Three-Year Cycle

The children in the final year of each level are a vital component to the classroom. Whether in the Children's House, Lower Elementary or Upper Elementary, the third year offers the child the opportunity to take his/her well earned and much anticipated place in the community as a leader and a mentor. In this role the students give back to the community that was provided for them for two years. These early experiences of stewardship and service are key elements of an interdependent community and of our mission to educate each child for life.

For this reason, we ask families to consider carefully their long-term plans prior to enrolling their child at WMS. Once a family has made the decision to have one child leave the school before the end of a three-year cycle, we will continue to offer enrollment/re-enrollment to younger siblings until the sibling has completed the final year of his or her cycle. Admission to the next level will be reviewed at that time with the Head of School.

The Middle School will offer a three-year cycle in the 2011-2012 school year.

WMS values diversity in both the student body and the faculty. We enroll students and hire teachers without regard to race, religion, sex or national origin.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Overview

WMS prepares children ages 18 months through fifteen years for life-long learning and meaningful participation in a rapidly changing society. The activities and environments provided by the school are designed to stimulate a thirst for learning, an abiding curiosity about one's surroundings, and the desire and ability to work independently.

We aim to develop in each child the ability to solve problems, to use freedom wisely, to respect him/herself and others, and above all, to take joy in learning.

At WMS, we view education as an aid to life, which includes, but is not limited to mastering intellectual skills. We ascribe to Montessori's belief that

"The young child has one intuitive aim – his self-development. He wants to do and see for himself, through his own senses and not through the eyes of an adult. He becomes a full person. He is educated."

Extending this philosophical statement, we have developed the following goals, which apply to our entire program.

Overarching Goals:

1. Help the child develop self-confidence as an independent learner.
2. Assist the child in developing the habits of concentration, initiative, curiosity, and persistence.
3. Support the achievement of inner security through physical and mental order.
4. Enhance the development of sensory-motor skills.
5. Sharpen the child's ability to discriminate and judge.
6. Encourage the development of creative intelligence and imagination.
7. Instill in the child a commitment to peaceful daily living.

Your Child's Day at School

Because we are a developmental program focused on helping each child reach his/her full potential, the structure of your child's day and the manner of interacting with adults and peers is of paramount importance. While each program level (Toddler, Children's House, Elementary, and Middle School) responds to the unique needs of children at these developmental stages, all of our programs share these core characteristics:

- **Large blocks of uninterrupted time for self-directed work.** The morning work period, from 8:30 to between 11:00 and 11:30 (depending on the child's age) is especially important. For older children, an afternoon work period is also a feature of his/her day. It is critical that your child arrive at school in time to begin this period with the rest of his/her peers.
- **The teachers' intense focus on the children.** Successful Montessori teaching is based on detailed and ongoing observation of the children, both individually and as a group. Once the school day begins, teachers are immersed in the work of the classroom, which

means they are not able to give parents or other visitors attention. We support this element of the program by limiting interruption during the school day. Teachers are available after school for conferences or telephone conversations.

- **Consistency in Routines and Order in the Physical Environment.** Children, especially those between two and five, are sensitive to routines and order and they respond positively to consistency in their daily lives. An orderly classroom environment (everything has its place and everything is in its place) fosters independence as children are given lessons in caring for their environment and share responsibility for its maintenance. Daily jobs, such as helping younger friends put on their coats, feeding classroom animals, or setting the table reinforce a predictable pattern of expectations. Because of the presence of routines and order, there is very little adult “correcting” of students’ behavior.
- **Meticulous attention to Grace and Courtesy.** At all times we aspire to model good manners and sociable interactions. You should expect to be greeted with a cheerful “good morning” or “good afternoon” during arrivals and departures. Mealtimes are opportunities to practice table manners, and lessons in making an introduction, offering refreshments, and solving problems peacefully are a regular part of the curriculum.

The Toddler Room

The WMS Toddler Room is home to fourteen children, and is staffed by a trained Montessori toddler directress and an assistant. Ann Marakos, the Toddler Directress, has been with the school since 1991. The Toddler Room provides an environment that meets the needs of children 18 months to three years of age.

Entry into this environment begins gradually, with parent and child coming together for short periods of time until both child and parent establish trust in the educators and the new environment. This “phasing in” also supports the child’s process of separating from the parents, which is the primary challenge of the toddler period.

Adults demonstrate respect for toddlers by:

- ◆ Preparing a safe environment which allows for maximum freedom of movement.
- ◆ Protecting their concentration and movement except for reasons of safety.
- ◆ Using a gentle tone of voice for speaking.
- ◆ Telling children what is going to happen in the room ahead of time (changing a diaper, serving lunch) and encouraging their participation in this process.
- ◆ Adapting adult actions to the child’s pace rather than expecting the child to adapt to the adult’s.
- ◆ Using positive methods of limit setting. We do not use physical punishment at WMS.
- ◆ Carefully observing each child and following their lead in preparing a responsive, nurturing environment.

We expect that parents who enroll their children in the Toddler Room will commit themselves to providing a home environment that is consistent with this philosophy of child development.

The Children's House

Serving children ages three to six years old, each of our three Children's Houses is designed to meet the emerging developmental needs of pre-school age children. While each of the houses has a unique character, all are governed by the core goals of concentration, coordination, independence and order. Each house, as the name implies, is a home for the children. Here a child will find a peaceful, orderly environment, rich in hands-on materials, where he or she can come and feel free to grow among his or her peers.

All classes have an appropriate balance of ages, males, and females. Bright, well-equipped Montessori environments provide settings for a wide variety of activities to promote self-help skills, refinement of the senses, development of gross and fine motor skills, social amenities, and language and cognitive development. Mornings are devoted to an extended (approximately three hours) "work period." Following a nutritious lunch served "family style," younger children nap or enjoy quiet activities while 5 and 6 year olds are involved in more abstract study of math, reading, writing, the natural and physical sciences, geography and cultures.

Outside time is shared among the children of all three Children's Houses. A sand playground provides safe, sturdy equipment for swinging, climbing, and balancing. A digging area often becomes the stage for cooperative and imaginative play opportunities. A shady arboretum invites restful conversation. Running and ball games are played in a separate fenced area.

Classes are in session from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. 3 and 4 year olds have the option of attending for half-days (from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.) or for full days. Before school care is available from 7:30 am, and after school care is available from 3:00 pm to 5:30 pm.

Children's House 1

The largest of the three classrooms, Children's House I (CH 1) is directed by Montessori trained educator: Angela Tambone, who has been with WMS since 1985. CH 1 serves thirty children, with one teacher and two assistants

Children's House 2

Serving 20 students directed by two teachers, CH 2 is guided by Katie Brumfield, an experienced Montessorian who has been with the school since it opened in 1982.

Children's House 3

CH 3 is directed by a Beverlee Mendoza, a veteran Montessorian at WMS since 1989. Eighteen children, supervised by two teachers, live and work together from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm. Before and after school care is available.

The Elementary Program

The WMS Elementary program is designed to meet the unique needs of children between the ages of 6 and 12. Nicole Ellis and David Murphy direct the Lower Elementary (ages 6-9) environments. Lisa Blackford directs the Upper Elementary program (ages 9-12). Since 2001, the Lower Elementary program has been located in the renovated Cundari House. In 2005, WMS acquired the use of a historic house in Colonial Williamsburg, which now serves as the home of our Upper Elementary community.

Our beautiful environments are places where the values of independence, cooperation and self-discipline are emphasized and where education is seen as the ability to concentrate fully, to think critically, to explore joyfully, and to work purposefully, both individually and as part of a peaceful, cohesive community.

Elementary children have a three hour flexible work period both morning and afternoon to do self-directed work as well as be invited to lessons by the guide. Subjects include science (zoology, chemistry, physics, and botany), history, geography, language arts, and mathematics. The program also provides instruction in music, visual arts and drama, physical education, Spanish, field trips and “going out.”

We value your child’s participation in family life, which is why homework is minimal in the Montessori program. However, students do participate in projects that require research and attention beyond the classroom. Likewise, we expect reading to be a regular part of all students’ daily at-home routines.

The Elementary Program runs weekdays from 8:30 am to 3:00 pm (3:15 for Upper Elementary). Before school care is available from 7:30 am, and after school care is available from 3:00 pm to 5:30 pm.

The Middle School Program

The WMS Middle School is a community dedicated to building upon the foundation set in elementary years and serves students from 12 to 15 years of age. Jocelyn Swanson acts as the lead teacher of the Middle School, and is joined by an assistant and specialists in aquaculture, boatbuilding, Spanish, art, and music. The Middle School is housed at the Waterman’s Museum on the York River and takes advantage of the tremendous resources that both the Museum and the River offer.

As children journey into the wonderful era of adolescence, they have an increased need to explore the world around them and feel they are a vital part of the community. They are on a new cusp of developing skills for lifelong learning, social responsibility and effective habits of thought and action.

The ideal learning environment for adolescents fosters intellectual, physical, and emotional development (the whole person) and allows them to pursue their interests while achieving academic and leadership excellence. The Montessori process encourages lifelong learning and an approach to every experience as an opportunity to acquire knowledge, continue personal growth, and positively impact the environment.

Middle School course offerings include language arts, mathematics, science, history, geography, civics, physical education and health, fine arts, technology, life skills, and a year-long micro-

economy project. Other distinctive features of the program include access to science labs and research-based facilities; partnership with the Waterman’s Museum and other community resources; aquaculture service projects; oyster bed cultivation; and boat building. All courses of study are hands-on opportunities to engage in meaningful work. The curriculum is designed to equip students with skills, concepts, and habits of mind needed to succeed in high school advanced placement courses and college.

Before and After School Care

Before/After School care is available for Children’s House and Elementary. Before School Care begins at 7:30 a.m. After School Care begins directly after classes and ends at 5:30 p.m. Children’s House meets in the Welcome Room, located in front of Children’s House 1 (CH 1). Elementary care meets in the Cundari house.

Discipline

WMS believes that each child should strive to achieve self-discipline in both social and academic situations. Montessori distinguished between the “spontaneous discipline” typical of happily engaged children and adult-centered strategies for maintaining “control.” The ability to master one’s self is a foundational skill for all subsequent learning and it is a central goal of all our programs, especially the Children’s House, where developing the capacity to attain and sustain deep concentration is a primary focus. That focus is extended in the elementary, where self-paced, independent work shapes the experience. At the middle school level, students understand what discipline and responsibility means within group and social settings.

What Montessorians refer to as “grace and courtesy” is central to our entire program as it sets the stage for peaceful social interaction and compassionate living. The Montessori principal of teaching and modeling respect for self, for others and for the environment gives children opportunities to make appropriate choices in behavior. Teachers set limits and offer guidance through example. We try always to direct with positive rather than negative guidance. At all times patience, restraint, and respect for the child’s needs for sensitive intervention govern adult interaction with children.

Unacceptable Behaviors

Experimental behavior is a predictable feature of all developmental levels, and we strive to regard such behaviors as indicative of a child’s needs. We work with children to help them learn to make good choices and communicate their needs, develop problem-solving skills, and value respect, honesty, and trust. However, because the community lies at the center of our approach to learning, any individual action that negatively affects the welfare of the community is considered unacceptable. As a result, WMS cannot allow the following:

- Language that expresses disrespect for another person.
- Violent behavior, e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, throwing objects at a person, vandalism.
- Violent role-playing, including pretend gunplay.

- Repeated failure to follow instructions or community expectations.

Resolution Process for Unacceptable Behavior

The first instance of unacceptable behavior will be addressed by the adult who witnessed it. The staff member will redirect the behavior and then, depending on the child's age, discuss with the child privately why the behavior is inappropriate and strategies for preventing its recurrence. Parents may be notified by telephone or in writing.

In the event that a behavioral issue cannot be resolved by the faculty, the parents will be called to a meeting with the directress, Director of Education, and the Head of School. A plan of action for addressing the behavior will be developed. Each remediation plan will take into consideration the best interest of the individual child and the classroom community. If steps to correct the behavior fail, permanent dismissal is possible. Continued negative behavior may result in dismissal from the school.

Individualization, Child Study, and Special Needs

At WMS we regard all children as special. Central to the Montessori approach is the assumption that children develop at their own pace and the role of the adult is to assist in that development through sensitive observation and guidance. All learning is individualized and ongoing child study is a cornerstone of our approach to learning and teaching.

Within this framework, a wide range of learning styles is considered normal. From time to time, however, certain learning differences may call for special intervention. Whenever we suspect a child may benefit from such intervention, we initiate a formal Child Study. The purpose of the Child Study is to:

1. Provide support for teachers
2. Identify children who may need extra support
3. Develop an intervention plan

Our policy for conducting child study consists of the following steps.

1. The child study may be initiated by a parent or a teacher. If a teacher initiates the process, the parent will be informed. The child study "team" will consist of the child's classroom teacher, the Director of Education, the child's parents, and the Head of School.
2. We will conduct at least two observations, by Montessori trained faculty.
3. Observations will lead to recommendations for possible interventions and/or classroom modifications aimed at meeting the child's needs.
4. All recommendations will be documented and shared with parents.
5. If the recommendation involves referral to a specialist, we ask that all reports and documentation be shared with the school.

6. If the recommendation does not involve referral, but does involve specific suggestions for supporting the child, that plan will be documented, placed in the child's file and a follow-up meeting will be scheduled for no later than 90 days following the initial child study.
7. If the initial recommendations fail to produce successful results, the child will be referred to his/her home school district for further assessment relative to eligibility for Special Services.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Children's House Birthdays

We observe birthdays in a special way here at WMS. Rather than parties, we set aside time for communal celebration and reflection, and each class has its own tradition. We encourage you to share in this special occasion by talking to your child's teacher about which day your child will celebrate at school and what to expect.

Our library maintains a collection of pre-selected "birthday books" which parents may purchase to present to the school to honor their child's birthday. These books are inscribed on a bookplate and placed in the WMS library. Check with the librarian if you would like to choose a book.

Family Events

We mark the beginning and ending of each school year with a celebration for the entire WMS family. The Ice Cream Social takes place late in September at a local park, and the Family Picnic in June is a school wide potluck with pony rides and a magic show.

Additionally, the Children's Houses and the Elementary programs each sponsor "rising up" and closing ceremonies to end the academic year. You will learn more about the specifics of each of these events as the dates approach.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

General Health Policies

Good nutrition is an essential component of every child's growth. We strongly encourage you to offer your child healthy, nutritious foods both at home and we will do so here at school in lunch and snacks. We make every effort to avoid sugars, trans fats, high fructose corn syrup, food preservatives and colorings. Breakfast is of particular importance for school success, so please provide your child the “brain food” they need before coming to school.

Poor diet, poor sleep, and overexposure to screen time (TV and computer games) are factors more and more psychologists attribute to the rise in cognitive as well as behavioral problems in children. The brain needs enough sleep to function effectively.

How much sleep is enough?

For three year olds, most experts recommend a minimum of 12 hours of sleep a day, usually with 11 of those at night. For six year olds, the number is closer to 11 hours.

For 12 year olds, a minimum of 9.5 hours is recommended.

Illnesses

Regular attendance is important for all children. However, there is no advantage to sending a sick child to school. Please keep your child home if the following conditions exist:

- ◆ Above-normal temperature (child should be at normal temperature without medication for 24 hours before returning). Special note: even if the temperature is caused by a non-contagious illness, the child should not come to school. Fever indicates that a body is under stress or is fighting infection. In this condition, complications can arise; therefore, we cannot assume responsibility for monitoring a sick child.
- ◆ Rash.
- ◆ Discharge from ears or eyes; inflammation of eyes.
- ◆ Sore throat or persistent cough.
- ◆ Fresh cold with a profuse green or yellow discharge from the nose.
- ◆ Child is not well enough to play outside.
- ◆ Vomiting, the night before or the morning of attending school.
- ◆ Continuous diarrhea.
- ◆ Any type of contagious disease.

Should a child become ill during the course of the day or arrive too ill to participate in the activities of the day (in the opinion of the Directress in consultation with the Head of School), parents will be notified and asked to take the child home.

Please notify WMS promptly if your child will be absent for any length of time. We also need to know when your child contracts a contagious disease so that parents of the other children may be advised of possible exposure. Medical forms and Immunization charts signed by a physician are required before a child begins at WMS. An updated form is required at the start of each year for

the Children's House children and every six months for any child under 2 years of age. Elementary aged children need proof of immunization records before entering the school.

Medications

Program staff (teachers, assistants and administrators) **MAY NOT** administer any kind of medication (prescription or over-the-counter) to the students **EXCEPT** for emergency EpiPen and inhaler administration for students with extreme allergies or medications included in ADA regulations. Contact the office for a Written Medication Consent Form.

General Safety Precautions

Our approach to providing a safe school combines reasonable precautions with common sense. All classrooms are locked following the morning drop-off procedure. Families arriving after 8:45 am should check in at the office to receive a key. We conduct regular fire and safety drills throughout the year, and we comply with Virginia state licensing regulations by providing training in CPR, childhood health and medications, and playground safety to our staff.

Authorized Pickup

Children enrolled at WMS may leave the premises only with parents or individuals authorized by the parent/guardians. Anyone requesting to pick up a child will be asked to confirm his or her identity through the use of a picture ID. If prior permission has not been obtained, or authorization cannot be validated; the child will not be permitted to leave the center with that individual.

Parents are responsible for making sure that an accurate list of authorized individuals is kept on file in the office. Should there be a need for a person not listed to pick up the child, we must have written notice from the parent stating the name of the individual picking up the child, the date, and approximate time. This information will be kept on file for future reference.

Please keep in mind that when a child is new to the center or a class, the office staff and teachers may ID you until they become familiar with your face. Please understand that this is for your child's safety and is a requirement of Virginia Minimum Standards for licensed child day centers.

Those individuals who are the legal guardian(s), or who have legal custody of a child enrolled in the center must provide the center a copy of the official documents so stating the arrangement. This information will be kept in your child's file so that should a question arise about custody, your child will not be released to an unauthorized individual. **Please be advised that unless proper documentation is provided to the center stating a parental custody arrangement, we are legally required to release a child to a biological parent.**

Emergencies

We ask all parents to complete an emergency form for their children. This form includes a medical release form, which parents should sign. If your child should become lost, seriously ill, or have an accident, the school will attempt to notify the parents. However, if neither parent can be reached, the release authorizes the school to seek emergency medical treatment for your child.

Communication, Evacuation, Shelter in Place Procedures

In case of an event that requires evacuation from the school, children will be relocated by bus or automobile to Lafayette High School.

WMS maintains appropriate supplies for an incident involving shelter-in-place (water, blankets, flashlights, battery-operated radio). In such an instance, students will remain in their classrooms until the incident is resolved. If an incident occurs at the Surry Nuclear Power Plant, the Longhill Road campus is within the “safe zone” and we will shelter-in place. Students at Scotland Street will be transported to Longhill Road to shelter-in-place.

In case of an event that requires evacuation or shelter in place, parents will be notified by (a) web site announcement, (b) e-mail broadcast, (c) SchoolReach telephone broadcast.

Reports to Authorities

We are required by Virginia State Law to report any suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the Department of Social Services or to the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.

BEING A PARENT AT WMS

Being a parent at WMS assumes both a major investment and a major commitment. A WMS education extends well beyond the basics of literacy and numeracy into the social and spiritual aspects of life. This applies to parents as well as children. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations.

We build our most productive relationships with parents who understand and embrace the mission of the school. To that end, we help parents learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for parent education as part of the admission process—so that parents can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children—and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family’s years at the school. Once children are enrolled, the school expects parents to attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and parent education events, and to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies and procedures contained in this *Handbook* and other school publications.

Parents often ask for help in creating consistency between home and school, and much of our communication with you is aimed toward supporting this goal. This begins with the general principle, “Never do something for your child that he can do for himself.” Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that a child can do for himself at each stage of

development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which we were parented. In general, Montessori teaching relies on “showing” rather than “correcting.”

We understand that the school/home partnership so vital to successful Montessori education begins with honest, open inquiry and deepens into trust. We invite you to let us know your thoughts, questions, and concerns, as we are committed to working together to serve the child.

Communication

At WMS we strive to foster clear and robust communication between home and school. The chart below offers guidance regarding the proper channels to use for gaining information and solving problems.

Matter Related to:	First Contact
Child’s progress Classroom activities Specialists Class procedures Behavior and discipline	Directress
Facilities Legal matters Fundraising Public relations	Head of School <i>Sandy Andrews</i>
Pedagogical issues Academic policy Parent education	Director of Education <i>Laura Haskins</i>
After School Issues After School Assistants After School Schedule	Full Day Coordinator Staff, Children’s House <i>Jessica Kaufman, Elementary</i>
Daily scheduling Student records Observations Registration Admissions Parent Volunteering	Registrar <i>Elizabeth Hollis</i>
Billing/accounts Changes in tuition	Bursar <i>Anita Kohli</i>

In addition to the above guidelines for channeling the flow of communication, we call your attention to the following elements of our program designed to enhance the school-home relationship:

Classroom Observation

There is no better way to gain an understanding of your child's experience here at school than by observing in the classroom. Knowing what is going on in the classroom provides a common point-of-reference for you and your child to talk about his or her "work" at school. It also enhances communication with teachers. Beginning in October, our programs are open to anyone interested in observing the Montessori environment. In order to preserve the quiet atmosphere of the classroom, we limit visitors to one per day. Please schedule your observation time with the office.

Conferences

You may schedule a conference with your child's teachers at any time by contacting them through the school office, either by note, e-mail, or phone call.

Formal conferences for all programs are scheduled two times a year, in the late fall and early spring. School is closed to accommodate these events and parents arrange individual appointments through the office.

Progress Reports

All students receive formal progress reports twice yearly. You will notice that these documents are notable for the level of detail they provide; they will tell you not only how your child is doing, but also what your child is doing. Normally, progress reports are distributed prior to scheduled conferences, and we hope you will use these reports to prepare for any subsequent meetings you may have with your child's teacher. Like classroom observation, they provide a concrete point-of-reference for discussing the nature of your child's work at school.

Parent Seminars

All of our programs offer parent seminars regularly. These gatherings are usually organized around a Montessori-related topic. They are opportunities to share information about making the most of a Montessori education. These events will be advertised as we develop them; we encourage you to join us.

Notes, Reminders, and Updates

We distribute (electronically) a weekly bulletin of *Tuesday Tidings* featuring general information related to school and classroom events. Our newsletter, *Montessori Matters*, is published monthly (both electronically and in print).

Website

The WMS website contains the most up-to-date information about the WMS experience, including calendar updates. In addition, the site contains a special, password-protected section open only to current WMS families. Here you will find up-to-the minute news related to individual classrooms. Our web address is www.williamsburgmontessori.org.

Telephone/Fax/E-mail:

The office is open for calls 8:00 am to 5:30 pm each day. Please call the school's general number, 565-0977, during these hours.

Teachers are not available for calls during school hours, but they will return calls as soon as possible after 3:00 pm. The school fax number is 220-6655. The school e-mail address is: wms@williamsburgmontessori.org.

WMS relies regularly on e-mail as a tool for sharing important information about goings on at school. We publish e-mail addresses in our school directory and broadcast information using a distribution list. We ask that all WMS families respect the privacy of individual members of the community and only use e-mail information for school-related purposes.

The Parents Association

The spirit of volunteerism and community commitment that is a hallmark of the school is exemplified in the work of the Parents' Association. All WMS parents are considered members. Organized to provide opportunities for service as well as fellowship, the PA interfaces with all sectors of the WMS community and its work is distributed among four key standing committees. Upon enrollment in WMS, all parents are invited to indicate their interest in serving on one or more of these committees. The current committees are Social, Fundraising, Beautification, and Public Relations.

Liaisons and Mentoring

All new families are assigned a mentor family to assist with the transition into our community. Additionally, each classroom is supported by the leadership of a designated Parent Liaison. Liaisons coordinate information sharing, mentoring for new families and other special events.

TRANSPORTATION

Arrival

Arriving at school is an important transition time for all children. It is also a hectic time of day. Please observe the following procedures to help make the transition as smooth as possible.

Toddlers

Toddler parents accompany their children to the Toddler door, wait for the child to ring the bell, and go inside. Once inside, please sign the attendance sheet. This procedure supports separation from the parent.

The greeting teacher is required by licensing to do a quick medical check to make certain that sick children do not enter the environment. Please inform us of any unusual symptoms your child may have. We do not administer any medication other than emergency EpiPen or inhaler, or medications included in ADA regulations.

Car Line

For children in the Children's Houses and Lower Elementary, drop-off time is between 8:30 and 8:45. During this period children will be greeted at the car by a teacher and escorted to the appropriate classroom. This is the most hectic time of day, and for safety reasons, we ask your help in keeping the car line moving. It is critical that all drivers pull all the way up to the front of the line, and allow teachers to assist the children is exiting the car (please do not get out of your car to help with car seats or seat belts, as this brings the operation to a halt). If your child arrives after 8:45 am, it will be necessary for the driver to park, go to the office to obtain the key, and then accompany your child to the appropriate classroom.

Arrival at Scotland Street

There is no car line at the Scotland Street campus. Students may elect to use the shuttle service between the Longhill Road campus and Scotland Street. In this case, the bus will depart the Longhill Road parking lot at 8:15 am. All other students must be escorted to the gates of the Scotland Street campus by a parent. Parking is available in the Prince George Street Garage or in the Municipal lot, about a block away from campus. Under no circumstances may parents stop in front of the school building to drop-off students.

Before-school arrivals

Children who are enrolled in before-school care may arrive anytime between 7:30 and 8:30 am. If your child arrives before 8:30, please accompany her to the front door of the CH 1 Welcome Room (for 3-6 year olds) or through the Japanese garden to the library doors for the Elementary Before/After School Program. No child shall be left to enter the building by himself.

Departure

Toddlers

At departure time, toddler parents come into the building, check their child's basket or cubby for soiled clothes or other notices, sign out, and assist their child in the transition from WMS to home. Please check the bulletin boards above the sign-in sheets daily for special messages.

Car Line

School dismisses at 3:00 pm for all extended day and elementary children. Between 3:00 and 3:15, all Extended Day Children's House children will dismiss from the front of the car line (they will be seated on benches outside the Office). Elementary children will be dismissed in front of the Cundari House. The same guidelines for morning car line apply in the afternoon; we ask that the line be kept moving.

At Scotland Street

Students who use the shuttle will be picked up at 3:15 pm for transport back to Longhill Road, where they may either join after school activities or meet their parents in the parking lot. Students who are to be picked-up at Scotland Street may meet their parents at the front of the building.

After School Pick-up

Between 3:30 and 5:30, parents of children participating in after school activities should park, enter the building, and greet your children. Depending on when you arrive, your child will be either in the Welcome Room, in the Elementary Before/After school area in the Cundari House or on the playground.

Pick-up Authorization

We are required by law to have written authorization from parents which states the name of persons authorized and not authorized to pick up your child. We will not release any children to people not authorized to pick up. Please send a note if they are to be picked up by someone other than the parents.

Volunteer Drivers

We appreciate and depend on parents who are willing to support the school as a volunteer driver. In order to comply with insurance standards of Virginia state licensing requirements, it is necessary for each parent driver to fill out and sign the *Parent Volunteer Driver Agreement* form prior to transporting children. This form is available in the office.

Car Seats and Seatbelts

The law in Virginia is that all children under 8 years of age must be in a car seat or a booster seat. We also require that all children 6 years and older leaving the building be buckled up. All children should be seated in the rear seat of the car to prevent air bag injuries.

Carpools

Many of our children come to school via carpools. In order to help parents with carpool arrangements, we issue a complete parents/student roster with the names, addresses and phone numbers of WMS families. This roster is printed in early September. We are happy to assist you with any carpooling arrangements.

Parking

If you are escorting your child into the building or attending to any school business, you may park in any available parking space on the school lot. Please do not park in the drop-off or pick-up line as this will interfere with arrival and dismissal procedures as well as violating the fire code.

A Note on Lateness

Following Dr. Montessori's belief that all work has a beginning, a middle, and an end, we expect all students to arrive at school and be picked up on time. The late arriving child misses the peaceful transition into the classroom that sets the tone for the day. He enters a working classroom where friends have already chosen work and work partners, and the teacher is absorbed in giving lessons.

Similarly, parents late in picking up their children put an unnecessary strain on the child anxiously waiting to go home. Lateness in pick-up also places strain on our faculty: since we do not budget to pay teachers after dismissal time, we must pass this cost along to parents.

Latecomers will be charged \$1.00 per minute. *Following the third incident of lateness, families will be charged \$5.00 per minute.* As a demonstration of our good faith, we will overlook the first incident. Similarly, if you are detained, please call to alert us of your expected arrival.

Cell Phones

We ask that parents refrain from using cell phones while on campus. In order to insure the safety of the children and staff during drop-off and pick-up, cell phones may not be used while in the carpool line. Students must have their phones turned off during the school day and stored in their backpacks. Any student receiving a call, answered or unanswered, making a call, texting or utilizing any of its facilities will be subject to its confiscation. Having personal electronic equipment in school such as radios, tape recorders, televisions, video games, disc/cassette players, iPods, pagers, laser flashlights/pens and beepers conflicts with education and social objectives of the school and therefore these items are not allowed in school.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

Tuition

Once a child has been accepted to WMS, there will be a non-refundable tuition deposit. For new families the deposit due is \$350 for Toddlers, \$450 for Children's House, and \$650 for Elementary and Middle School. For re-enrolling families the deposit due is \$300 for Toddlers and Children's House, and \$500 for Elementary and Middle School. A development fee of \$300 is billed to each new family. Returning families contribute \$150 annually to the school's long-term development.

Tuition payments may be made annually, due August 1st; bi-annually, due August 1st and January 1st; or monthly on the first of each month, August 1st through May 1st (Toddler: August 1st through July 1st). A discount applies for tuition fees paid in one installment.

WMS utilizes the services of a tuition insurance plan through A.W.G. Dewar, Inc. to protect your obligation under your Enrollment Contract. This plan insures your tuition in the event of your child ceasing to attend WMS and allows you to recover a portion of the tuition paid/owed. The child must attend the school for 14 days in order to utilize the tuition insurance option. The school collects any claim payment from the insurance company to which you are entitled and credits it to your account. You will be invoiced by WMS for any remaining due amounts. The insurance premium is optional for those who pay tuition and fees in one or two payments; it is mandatory for all others.

Regardless of what method of payment you choose, the first tuition payment is due on or before August 1st. For those on the bi-annual plan, the second payment will be due in January. For those on the monthly plan, the August payment will be one month's tuition in advance, which will be credited and used as the last tuition payment of the year.

A late fee of ten percent of the outstanding balance will be charged if payments are not received within five (5) days of the scheduled billing date. Tuition or fees remaining unpaid for more than two months can result in suspension of the student at the end of the semester (until such time as the account is made current) and/or referral to a collection agency. By enrolling a student at the school, you accept the obligation to reimburse the school for any attorney's fees and costs incurred in the collection of any unpaid balance. Transcripts will not be released without full payment of all financial obligations.

Financial Aid

WMS is able to extend tuition assistance to current families based on demonstrated financial need and the availability of funds. Our financial aid program is limited and depends on successful fund raising and the gifts of alumni and friends. At this time grants will be made to students who are already enrolled in the school and will be for a one-year period. Parents must be employed; maximum allotment is 30% of tuition. Funds are not available for before or after school care. Grants will be awarded by June 1 for the following school year.

Withdrawal, Dismissal and Non-Enrollment

WMS recognizes that some families may face situations where they will be unable to remain at the school for the entire year or enroll their child as planned. Please contact the Head of School should your child need to withdraw from the school or be unable to enroll. In addition, the school may suspend or dismiss a student in disciplinary cases, following procedures outlined under "Discipline" in this *Handbook*. In all cases, the obligation of the parent(s) to pay the fees for the full academic year remains unconditional after receipt of the enrollment agreement by the school.

In situations where withdrawal occurs before the beginning of the academic year, the school must balance the needs of the withdrawing family with its responsibilities to the rest of the student population and the school community. Accordingly, if a family signs an enrollment contract for the upcoming school year but then provides written notification of withdrawal (either by hand or postmarked) to the school by April 30th prior to the start of that school year, the school shall retain the contracted tuition deposit and all applicable fees but forgive the remainder of the contractual obligation for tuition.

A Montessori Glossary

Montessori educators have been specially trained to work with your children. Sometimes Montessorians use a special language to describe how they interact with children and the educational environments they work in. Some of these key words and phrases will also become part of your child's vocabulary. To help with translation we provide the following definitions of commonly-used Montessori terms and expressions.

AMI: Association Montessori Internationale – the professional organization founded by Maria Montessori in 1929 to preserve and protect the integrity of the Method.

AMS: American Montessori Society – the professional organization founded in 1960 to disseminate and promote Montessori in the United States.

Children's House: Also known as the primary classroom, Casa dei Bambini, 3-6 environment.

Control of Error: A key design feature of Montessori materials, allowing students to correct themselves if exercises are done incorrectly.

Directress: Montessori educator, sometimes known as **Guide**.

Follow the Child: What your child's teachers do. Based on careful observation, each child is allowed to pursue the monumental task of developing him or herself. By following the child we are able to recognize the child's "sensitive periods" (see below).

Grace and Courtesy: An important part of the curriculum at all levels and a key tool we use in cultivating a healthy community, resolving conflicts peacefully, and developing habits of care and respect.

Lower Elementary: 1st-3rd grades, usually children between the ages of 6-9 who made the transition into the second plane of development (see below).

Middle School: Ages 12-15. 7th and 8th grade.

Planes of Development: Maria Montessori based her concept of the four planes of development on observations of children throughout childhood and adolescence. These planes are in six-year groupings: 0-6, 6-12, 12-18, 18-24. The first three years of each grouping are characterized by the greatest change in that plane (physical, mental, spiritual), with the last three years being characterized by a crystallization and extension of previous growth. For your child, that means the first three years of any developmental plane he or she will experience rapid and dramatic growth, followed by a time of stabilization and refinement. The balance between growth and stability also visible among the four planes themselves. 0-6 and 12-18 are periods of great physical and emotional transformation, while 6-12 and 18-24 are more stable. The four planes of development also guide our focus on three year educational cycles.

Prepared Environment: An inviting, carefully organized learning environment (classroom) filled with meticulously-chosen “materials” for development. The environment encourages independence and concentration and enables the child to develop in optimal conditions.

Sensitive Periods: Another key concept of Montessori’s developmental theory. Careful observation allows a Montessori educator to recognize the times when a child is ready for a new learning experience. The directress can then “direct” the child toward materials that will satisfy his or her developmental needs. Most sensitive periods occur in the first plane of development, and include movement, order, language, manners, writing, reading and so on.

Upper Elementary: Ages 9-12, 4th-6th grade.

Work: What your child does at school. Work, in a Montessori setting, is not the same as a job. It is not tedious or boring. Rather it is the way your child creates him or herself through purposeful activity in which your child is fully and joyfully engaged.