



2016-2017 Parent Handbook

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amherstmontessori.org

**AMHERST MONTESSORI SCHOOL
PARENT HANDBOOK**

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Our School

Amherst Montessori School's Mission

We provide a warm, safe, and supportive community that nurtures a lifelong love of learning. We honor each child's path as they become independent, confident, and compassionate individuals, while learning to care for themselves, others, and the world.

Amherst Montessori School, guided by the educational philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori, nurtures the natural unfolding of the whole child in a supportive, culturally rich, and diverse learning community. Our belief is that through the deep realization of each individual's unique gifts and abilities, we become independent, self-motivated, and contributing members of the world's community.

Dr. Maria Montessori: Educator & Visionary

Dr. Maria Montessori was, in many ways, ahead of her time. Born in Italy in 1870, Montessori became Italy's first female medical doctor. In 1906, she accepted the challenge to work with a group of 60 children of working parents in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. It was there that she founded the first Casa de Bambini, or "Children's House." What ultimately became the Montessori Method of education developed there, based upon Montessori's scientific observations of these children's almost effortless ability to absorb knowledge from their surroundings, as well as their tireless interest in manipulating materials.

"Follow the child." This simple but profound truth inspired Montessori's life-long pursuit of educational reform, methodology, psychology, teaching, and guide training – all based on her dedication to furthering the self-creating process of the child. Montessori was nominated for The Nobel Peace Prize for her work in developing Peace Education curricula for children.

The Montessori Philosophy

Dr. Maria Montessori believed, "A child's work is to create the person he will become." Children are born with great mental capacities, which aid in the work of their own construction. They accomplish the task of self-construction with purposeful movement, exploration, and discovery of their environment. A Montessori classroom provides this freedom within limits of an environment, which develops a sense of order and self-discipline.

Essential to the Montessori Method is the prepared environment. Attention to quality, detail, and beauty are essential in drawing the child to activities in the classroom. By providing an attractive, enjoyable, organized, and child-centered

classroom, our programs enable children to be free to fully explore and experience the learning-rich, prepared environment.

Also basic to Montessori's philosophy is her discovery of the Sensitive Periods in children's development. During these periods children seek certain stimuli with immense intensity, to the exclusion of all others. It is during this time that a child can most easily master a particular skill. Dr. Montessori devised special materials to aid children in each specific Sensitive Period. Our guides are trained to recognize these periods in individual children and guide them to the appropriate materials in the classroom environment.

The focus of Montessori education continually changes to adapt to the child's natural stages of development. Montessori described these stages as Planes of Development, which occur in approximately six year intervals, each of which is further subdivided into three year segments. These Planes of Development are the basis for the three year age groupings found in Montessori school classes, ages zero to three; three to six; six to nine; nine to twelve; and twelve to fifteen.

From this environment comes concentration, a clear and peaceful mind, a profound sense of security, and respect for others and one's self. The program constantly evolves based on the needs of the children while remaining firmly grounded in the Montessori education philosophy.

The following is from a 1913 letter from A. Graham Bell regarding his observations of children at work using the Montessori Method:

"When the children had completed an absorbing bit of work, they appeared rested and deeply pleased. It almost seemed as if a road had opened up within their souls that led to all their latent powers, revealing the better part of themselves. They exhibited a great affability to everyone, put themselves out to help others and seemed full of good will."

The Cornerstones of the Montessori Method

Respect

Children are respected as unique individuals.

Absorbent Mind

Children possess an acute sensitivity for absorbing and learning from their environment.

Purposeful Activity

Children have a deep love and need for real life activities. When they are "playing" with practical life materials they are indeed "working" to learn about the world around them.

Self-Discipline

Children gradually develop self-discipline through freedom of movement and freedom of choice. The Montessori materials give them a sense of satisfaction, which encourages them to concentrate and complete activities.

Independence

Children are encouraged and guided toward independence as early as possible to become well adjusted and able to function confidently by themselves and within a group.

Care of Self & the Environment

Children gain an understanding of their importance and impact on their community and world through practicing the skills necessary for self-care and tending to the environment.

The Peace Curriculum

At Amherst Montessori School, we are committed to helping children grow up as confident individuals who are respectful towards others, and who embrace the rich diversity of their community and world. Our peace and cultural curriculums develop an awareness of the similarities and differences among people in their own communities and around the world. The basic components of the Montessori peace curriculum are:

Self Awareness	Awareness of Others	Love and Respect of Nature
Imagination	Global Awareness	Conflict Resolution

Our peace curriculum also focuses on each individual's development and sense of inner peace. By creating an environment that allows the child to explore at their own pace, our hope is that over time, our children develop a deep appreciation for the peacefulness that can be achieved through concentration on a particular task or work. As our children grow into adults, and move out into the world, we hope that the foundation of peacefulness through concentration will stay with them as they engage in the responsibilities of adulthood.

Finally, each classroom has a peace table where children can go to discuss and work through misunderstandings and conflicts. Initially, children are guided through the language they need to express their feelings before becoming confident and comfortable in both sharing their feelings, and listening to the feelings of a friend, on their own. As they mature, they refine their own skills in communicating and resolving conflicts, and utilize the peace table independently without adult mediation. This is a skill that our children carry into the world with peers, siblings, parents, and others.

Our Learning Community

A Brief History

Amherst Montessori School was founded in 1970 by a group of local educators and parents whose goal was to provide a Montessori education for their children. The school was incorporated and duly certified as a nonprofit educational organization in Massachusetts in 1978 and is recognized as tax-exempt by the Internal Revenue Service and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. After being located in various church buildings for seventeen years, the school built its own facility on Pomeroy Lane in 1986. Specifically designed as a Montessori School, it had two spacious classrooms scaled to accommodate the needs of young children. The school expanded in September 1995, and the Elementary program was added in an off-site location. In the fall of 1998 the Toddler program was starting to bring Montessori principals to toddlers and their parents. It, too, was run off-site.

In July 2012, the original schoolhouse at 27 Pomeroy Lane was razed to make way for the construction of a new building that would house all AMS programs on one campus. During the construction phase, all classrooms operated out of a nearby satellite campus. Construction of the new facility was completed in February 2013, and the new school opened its doors to the AMS community on February 26, 2013. As a response to a need in the community, Amherst Montessori added an Infant program for children ages six to fifteen months in August 2015.

Our Campus

Amherst Montessori School is located at 27 Pomeroy Lane in South Amherst, two miles from downtown Amherst.

Accreditation & Affiliations

Amherst Montessori School is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (DEEC).

The school is a member of the American Montessori Society, Montessori Schools of Massachusetts, and the Childcare Outlook Program. The school is proud to maintain high standards of Montessori principals and practices.

Parents may contact DEEC for information regarding Amherst Montessori School's compliance history. DEEC can be reached at 1441 Main Street, Suite 230 Springfield, MA 01103, or by phone at 413-788-8401.

Non-discrimination

Amherst Montessori School has no religious affiliation. Amherst Montessori School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, class, gender, gender identity and/or expression, age, sexual orientation, religion, culture, nationality, or ethnic origin in the administration of its admissions policies, educational programs, hiring practices, financial aid or other school-administered programs.

Our Staff

Amherst Montessori School strives to surround our students with consistent, well-educated, positive role models who love learning and are passionate educators. All programs are led by a certified Montessori guide who has earned, or is in the process of earning a credential through the American Montessori Society or the Association for Montessori International. Many of our assistant guides have attended Montessori assistant's training as well. Professional development is a priority for all staff. Teachers and administrators regularly attend conferences, workshops, and seminars to both inspire and educate themselves. Additionally, staff are required to visit and observe other schools to ensure that we are continually striving to improve and innovate in the way we teach and support students, and administer in our school.

Our Funding

Amherst Montessori School is an independent school. As such, it receives no state or federal education funds. Revenue for the school's operating budget is generated through tuition, fundraising, and supplemental programming such as camps. Amherst Montessori School is a non-profit organization.

Tax ID Number

The Amherst Montessori School tax-exempt identification number is 04-2660266.

The Board of Trustees

Governance resides in a Board of Trustees, which appoints the administrator, sets and maintains financial policies and the school budget, raises funds, and makes fundamental policy decisions. The following board members donate their time and services:

Patience Bousel

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Admissions & Administrative Details

Admission Procedures

Parents first join us for a tour of the school, including observations of the classrooms. Upon completing this visit parents receive an enrollment application. Applications are returned with a \$50 application fee and \$10 for each additional application. If space is available in the desired program, families will be contacted to schedule a classroom visit for their child with a Montessori guide. An acceptance, non-acceptance, deferment letter, or request for a second classroom visit will be sent to the family within one week of the interview. If space is not available, the registration will be placed on our waiting list and potentially forwarded to our next enrollment period.

Separate Registration Forms are required for school year and summer session enrollment. A medical information form (you can use ours or your physician's) must be filled out and signed by your child's physician and on file at the school on or before the day your child begins the program. It is a State of Massachusetts licensing requirement that the form be updated annually.

Please note that toilet training status is not an eligibility requirement for enrollment.

Tuition Payments and Late Fees

Amherst Montessori School uses Smart Tuition for its tuition billing service. Through Smart Tuition, payments can be made through credit cards or bank transfers. Parents may opt to pay in full for the year or pay semi annually with 50% due by June 1st and 50% by November 1st. Monthly payments are due the first day of each month, beginning in June and ending with the March payment. Payments received later than the 12th day of the month will be assessed a \$35 late fee. Accounts with checks returned for insufficient funds will be assessed a \$35 service charge. There is a \$50 annual billing fee for monthly and semi annual plans.

Delinquent Accounts

Tuition and fees must be current by the child's start date or the child will not be able to attend or return to the program. If the family's account becomes more than 30 days delinquent, the parents must make arrangements to bring the account current or the child will not be permitted to attend school.

Contract Termination Policy

Contracts may be canceled by the parent(s)/guardian(s) in writing with 60 days notice. The tuition deposit is an automatic forfeiture in all cases of contract termination.

No portion of tuition and fees, paid or outstanding, will be refunded or canceled, even in the event of absence, early withdrawal, or early dismissal, with the exception of the contract termination policy.

Financial Assistance

It is our strong belief that all children, regardless of socio-economic standing, can benefit from a Montessori education. We accept funds for children's tuition from the UMASS Graduate and Undergraduate Child Care Assistance Programs and the New England Farm Workers Council Voucher Program. AMS also has a tuition assistance program of its own. Requests for financial aid are submitted in February prior to the enrolling school year. Awards are made in the spring.

School Hours

The school is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily, with the exception of the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and the last day of the school year, which are both early dismissals for all students.

Infant/Young Toddler/Toddler

Morning Session: 8:15 - 11:30 a.m.

Lunch Session: 8:15 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

School day Session: 8:15 a.m. - 2:45 p.m.

Children's House/Casa de Niños

Morning Session: 8:15 a.m. - 1 p.m. (does not apply to Kindergarten)

School day session: 8:15 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

Elementary

School day session: 8:00 a.m. - 3:15 p.m.

Extra Hours

Before Care is available from 7:30 to 8:15 a.m. daily. 24-hour advance notice is appreciated for those not signed up for the full program. Before Care is not available for infants 6-15 months.

After Care is available from 3:00–5:30 p.m. daily, and requires advance notice for those not signed up for an After Care option (you may choose to sign up for After Care time from 3:00-4:00 p.m. or 3:00-5:30 p.m.).

If your child is not signed up for regular After Care, additional hours are \$12 per hour, billable in half hour increments.

Late Pickup Policy

Children who are not picked up at their dismissal time will remain in their classroom or After Care if space is available. If space is not available, the child will wait at the reception area. Extra hours fees will apply. Parents picking up after their scheduled pick-up time will be charged \$12 for the first 10 minutes, and \$2.00 a minute every minute thereafter.

Kindergarten Program Requirements

Children who are five years old on or before September 1st may join our Kindergarten program. Children who have completed two years of Montessori school and are deemed emotionally, socially, and academically ready by their lead guide, may be invited to join the Kindergarten program before their official Kindergarten year.

Parent Involvement

Parent Observation & Participation

Parents are always welcome to visit their child's classroom, whether just to observe or to share a story, a snack, or yourselves. We do caution parents not to visit during the first few weeks of school as this can set the child's expectations for the year. When possible, we ask the parent to schedule an observation or visit in advance; just to be sure the classroom does not have atypical programming taking place at the same time.

Parent/Guide Communication

Strong parent/guide communication is a key component to a vibrant and happy school community. Guides can be reached through a phone call to the main office with a request for a return phone call or by filling out a communication form and passing it to a guide or assistant. Also, during Back to School night each Montessori guide will share the best way to get in touch when needed. Please contact your child's guide with questions or concerns prior to seeking guidance from the administration when possible.

Back to School Night

Back to School Night is a time for you to get to know your child's guide, learn about special events, daily schedules and classroom projects, build your community, and ask all your questions.

Parent/Guide Conferences

Conferences for all parents and guides are conducted in January and May for all students. Your child's guide will discuss your child's use of time and materials, cognitive development, how s/he responds to the environment and how s/he is developing social relationships. This is also a wonderful time for both parent/guardian and guide to ask questions and share ideas.

Toddler and Children's House students will receive a progress report prior to each conference to provide parents time to process and formulate questions. The Elementary students will receive a progress report in January and on the last day of school.

Additionally, infant conferences will take place every three months. Students will receive progress report prior to each conference to provide parents time to process and formulate questions.

New families will have a short conference with the child's guide in October. This will not be accompanied by a written progress report, and is meant to be a check-in on the child's first six weeks in school.

Parent Hours

AMS requires each family to contribute 10 service hours to the school community each year. There are many opportunities to share your knowledge or hobbies with the classrooms, give time to maintain our school, or contribute time and expertise to school activities. Parents report their work hours to the office. Parents may "buy out" their volunteer hours at the price of \$20 per hour or \$200 for the full 10 hours.

AMS Parent Association

All parents are members of the school's Parent Association. The Parent Association facilitates educational enrichment activities, social functions, and outreach. This group coordinates many of the school's volunteer-driven social and fundraising activities.

Attendance: Transition, Arrivals & Dismissals

Transition Plans

Children are made aware of each transition. A guide lets children know that they are going to transition, and then accompanies them in their transition. A guide always tells parents what transitions a child will be making throughout the day and are aware that guides will be communicating about these transitions.

Children who transition between programs always have a classroom guide who accompanies them to the next program and children are given a verbal alert before the transition occurs. For instance, students who move from the afternoon session in Children's House to the After Care program are told by a guide to put away their work, gather their belongings, and are then assisted in walking from one room to the other. This provides strong communication between staff and each child.

When children are transitioning into the next stage of our program (for instance, a Toddler moves into Children's House), the child will hear about the transition for a week or so first. Then the child will visit the program for an hour or so to become comfortable with the new program. When the child is ready to start in the new program a short phase-in schedule will be set up so the child receives ample time to gradually adjust to the new environment.

Parents of children who finish the school year will be asked to complete an exit survey if their child is not returning to AMS the following school year. Classroom discussions regarding the child's departure from a program are done at the parent's discretion per the parent's instructions.

Attendance/Absences

If your child is going to be absent, please contact the office prior to the start of the day's class session. It is helpful to know why the child is absent, particularly in the case of certain contagious illness (chicken pox, strep throat, etc.), as we may need to notify other families of the situation.

Arrivals

Punctuality is important in our school environment. Elementary students should arrive promptly between the arrival window (8:00-8:15 a.m.) daily. Infant/Young Toddler/Toddler and Children's House students should arrive promptly during the arrival window (8:15-8:30 a.m.) to promote socialization and ensure a stress-free transition while allowing ample time for work activities. It is especially important for children who are experiencing separation anxiety to come to the classroom early as this can provide a smoother transition.

Drop Off Procedures

All classrooms:

Option 1: Carline Drop-Off

Please arrive to the carline for your appropriate arrival time. Staff will be outside on the front sidewalk from 8:00-8:30 a.m. to meet cars as they come around the circle. Stop your car at the end of the sidewalk and a staff member will open the car door, help your child from the car, and accompany your child into the building. To facilitate the carline please stay in your car and please do not let your child out of your car until the staff member has opened the door of your car. Your child will be greeted at the classroom door either by the Montessori guide or by an assistant.

Option 2: Park and Walk

You may park and walk your child into the building. Please do not leave your vehicle running. Please hold your child's hand, as there will be moving vehicles in the car line. Make sure to allow your child to put away his/her own backpack and coat independently, and please say good-bye to your child outside of the classroom door.

Please do not park in the traffic circle or block the sidewalk drop off area between 8:00-8:30 a.m. as we need to keep traffic moving. Please do not park along the front sidewalk at any time.

Dismissals

Please pick your child up promptly at his or her dismissal time. Our days are scheduled tightly, and staff often have an immediate obligation to other children following a dismissal time. If you must pick your child up before a regularly scheduled dismissal time, please notify the school in advance by calling ahead or sending in a written note for that day.

12:45/1:00 p.m. Dismissal

Infant/Young Toddler/Toddler parents are asked to arrive at 12:45 p.m. to pick up their children, while Children's House parents pick up at 1:00 p.m. Infant/Young

Toddler/Toddler parents may park their cars and come into the building (or find your child playing outside on the playground) to pick up children at 12:45/1:00 p.m. dismissal times.

2:45/3:00 p.m. Dismissal

Infant/Young Toddler/Toddler parents are asked to arrive at 2:45 p.m. to pick up their children, while Children's House parents pick up at 3:00 p.m. Infant/Young Toddler/Toddler parents may park their cars and come into the building (or find your child playing outside on the playground) to pick up children at the 2:45/3:00 p.m. dismissal time.

All Children's House Dismissals

Option 1: Carline Pick-Up

Stop your car at the end of the sidewalk and a staff member will bring your child outside, open the car door, and help your child into the car. To facilitate the carline please stay in your car.

Option 2: Park and Walk

You may park your car and come into the building (or find your child playing outside on the playground). Please do not leave your vehicle running. Please hold your child's hand in our parking lot, as there will be moving vehicles in car line. Make sure to allow your child to put on his/her own backpack and coat independently.

Please do not park in the traffic circle or block the sidewalk drop off area between 12:45 and 1:15 p.m., and 2:45 and 3:30 p.m., as we need to keep traffic flowing.

Elementary students will be dismissed via carline at 3:15 p.m.

After Care (until 4:00 or 5:30 p.m.)

At 4:00 p.m. dismissal, there will be a carline as described above. For pick-up after 4:00 p.m., children may be picked up directly from After Care. Please park your vehicle and turn off the engine. Please arrive early enough to allow your child time to put away his/her activities and to assist with group cleanup. Children have been instructed to use the Montessori materials only when the Montessori guide is present. Please support this policy by encouraging your child not to use the Montessori materials until the following day when a guide is in attendance.

Please do not leave children in an unattended car. Commonwealth law requires that all children be accompanied at all times by an adult and considers it neglect to leave any age child unattended in your vehicle.

Emergency Closings & Delays/Emergency Before and After Care Attendance

AMS makes an independent decision regarding emergency school closings, early dismissals, or delayed openings. This information will be available by 6:45 a.m. from the following sources:

1. Via email and text/phone call sent to parents. Make sure to accurately complete this section of your registration forms to ensure receipt of text/phone call in the event of a closure. You may opt-out if you do not want a text or phone call.
2. Posting on Amherst Montessori School website: amherstmontessori.org
3. Posting on 22 News, wwlp.com

Everyday Living in the Classroom

Snacks

We strive to provide snack choices that are healthy choices. Snacks are available in the morning in all classes, and during After Care. Children may choose to eat snack when they feel hungry. We provide two or three options for snack: grains, fruit or vegetables, or protein. We do not offer any food with sugar listed as the first ingredient.

The following items are examples of snacks we provide:

Fruits: Bananas, apples, pears, seedless grapes, melon, oranges, raisins

Vegetables: Celery, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, carrots, sweet peppers

Grains: Wheat thins, cheerios, blue corn chips, multi-grain crackers

Protein: Soybeans, cheese, plain yogurt

Lunch

All children bring a packed, trash-free lunch to school. A plain cloth bag or knapsack is preferred for lunches. (A large group of clanging lunch buckets displaying TV characters can distract from the mealtime.) We recommend reusable containers or a thermos. Prepackaged food in single serving containers is often difficult for children to open, and since it can't be resealed, often results in wasted food. We struggle to accommodate the volume of recycling required for these items. The school is unable to refrigerate or heat lunch for Young Toddler/Toddler and Children's House students. Elementary students may use the classroom microwave to heat their own lunch. Infant foods are heated as needed and as instructed by the parent.

Please provide the items listed below in your child's lunch:

A well-balanced nutritious meal

Thermos for foods meant to be eaten warm

Ice pack to keep meats and dairy products cold

A drink if desired (AMS provides water to accompany lunches and snacks)

A napkin

Some ideas for a healthy lunch:

Protein: Tuna fish, hard-boiled eggs, slices of meat, chicken, nuts (NO peanuts or peanut butter!), beans, tofu, yogurt, cottage cheese, other cheeses, etc

Fruits & Vegetables: Carrots, celery, lettuce, cucumbers, apples, bananas, oranges, grapes, green, orange, and red peppers

Grains: Whole wheat bread, rye crackers, whole wheat crackers
Dairy: Milk, cheeses, yogurt

Please do not send the items listed below in your child's lunch:

- Juice boxes (they squirt all over the children and are high in sugar)
- Gogurts (they squirt all over the children and their lunch area)
- Candy and other sweet foods (they make it difficult for the children to rest or work afterward)
- Items with caffeine (all chocolate contains caffeine)

We suggest that the children be included in the lunch-making process at home as they are more apt to eat the food they bring if they have helped to choose or make it.

All unfinished foods and beverages will be repacked in the reusable containers and sent home with your child. This allows you to gauge your child's appetite and adjust the size of portions according to his/her consumption.

Peanut Free School

Amherst Montessori School is a PEANUT FREE SCHOOL.

We have a few children in our classrooms with a life-threatening allergy to peanuts. Please DO NOT SEND ANY PEANUTS, PEANUT BUTTER, or PEANUT INGREDIENTS into the classroom for lunch. Your cooperation in carefully reading all ingredient labels is greatly appreciated. Even trace amounts of peanuts may create an unsafe situation. Some parents replace peanut butter with almond butter, sunflower butter or cashew butter.

Meals for Infants

Children under the age of 15 months are fed on demand, and therefore we provide food storage at school as specified by guidelines. Infants can bring food in a lunchbox with an icepack. In addition, breast milk or formula can be stored for our youngest students in the Infant or Young Toddler refrigerators. It is recommended that infants wean off of bottles at school around 12 months of age. Infants will be introduced to a drinking glass as part of their school day.

What to Wear

One of the qualities fostered in a Montessori classroom is independence. Sending Toddler and Children's House students in easily manageable clothing such as elastic waist pants or shorts, and slip over shirts or dresses will help develop their faith in their own abilities. Please make sure all jackets and sweaters have easy, working, full zippers. For all students, clothing and footwear must be appropriate for active and creative play. Also, children will paint, play, and get dirty! Please make sure clothing can endure our busy days.

Footwear needs to have both a closed front and some type of back, allowing children the freedom to climb and play safely. We also recommend a closed toe to protect

feet from the cement. Please do not send children in shoes with significantly high heels. Sneakers are always a good choice.

Each Toddler and Children's House family will need to provide their child(ren) with two complete changes of labeled clothing that are kept in or near their cubby in a separate container. Please include: two shirts, two pairs of underwear, two pairs of pants or shorts, socks, and a pair of indoor shoes with a rubber sole to remain at school such as slippers, with both a closed front and some type of back.

Please make sure all items that come to school are labeled with indelible marker. Even children who no longer have bathroom "accidents" may encounter water, paint spills, or puddles.

When a child has an accident, an adult will be available to help the child to clean their body with wipes and put on clean clothes.

Rest Time for Infants/Young Toddler/Toddlers & Children's House Students

The Department of Early Education and Care mandates that each child under the age of five be provided with the opportunity to rest each day. The school provides individual sleeping mats for each child. If your child will be resting, please send a small sheet. Your child may also include a blanket and/or a stuffed animal for rest time, which will need to remain in the nap bag. A plastic, re-sealable bag, with your child's name clearly marked on the outside of the bag will be provided for nap liners. Please mark each item clearly with your child's name. Sheets and blankets will be sent home each Friday (or the last day of your child's weekly schedule) to be laundered.

Sharing Treasures from Home

We appreciate a child's desire to share with their classmates personal treasures and experiences. We ask that parents help their children exercise tasteful choices in what they bring to AMS. Here are some guidelines:

- Natural specimens (rocks, shells, flowers, nests, etc.)

- Item which relates to an important story the child can relate from his personal life.

- Interesting books, especially those depicting a real-life situation. Just one at a time please.

- Items from other cultures

- Something the child has made

- A photo or a newspaper article which has particularly interested him

During our group times, children enjoy hearing about trips or other experiences of their classmates. You might discuss with your child any interesting experiences, which she could share with the group.

When your children bring objects to share, it is also helpful if you can discuss the object with your child so that they will be able to share some information with their

classmates about the object, such as where it is from, how they got it, what it's for, etc. It is important that your child is familiar with the object they bring in.

Sharing is not usually an everyday occurrence; be prepared for the object to spend a few days here. In some cases, the guide may ask your child to bring it again.

Please Note: *We ask that toys, cosmetics, stickers, jewelry, notebooks, pencils, and the like be used at home and not brought to school. We find these types of items can distract the child and his classmates from the special environment of the classroom. These items also cause arguments and feelings of possessiveness.*

Learning Support

When families and/or guides have concerns regarding a student's academic performance, physical development, or social and emotional well being, they can access the services of the Learning Support team. No question or concern is too small. The team consists of the Director of Education and/or a Board Certified Behavior Analyst and the Learning Support Guide. At AMS, one of the Director of Education's and/or the Board Certified Behavior Analyst's main role is to be a support for families and lead guides as they work to identify the student's strengths and needs in detail, and put structures and strategies in place to help a student reach their highest potential. The Learning Support Guide works directly with students to provide individual attention, tutoring, and other support to assist with academic and social/emotional success.

The Director of Education and/or the Board Certified Behavioral Analyst provides observation sessions to identify and address learning needs, and will consult with guides and families to gain an understanding of learning issues and aid them in the implementation of school-based accommodations. They will also assist with finding access to outside services for students if the need arises.

The following steps must be completed as part of the Learning Support process:

1. The lead guide will put strategies in place to see if improvements can be made within the classroom to assist the child. These can include problem solving with students, changes in room layout, and additional activities to meet student interests.
2. The classroom team will meet to exchange observational data and brainstorm additional teaching techniques that could assist the student.
3. The guide will conduct a minimum of two meetings with the student's family to discuss and share information about the student and discuss concerns, and the request for additional support from the Director of Education and/or Board Certified Behavior Analyst.
4. Parents will be clearly notified when observations of their child will take place in order to assist school staff and families in best supporting the student. An observation letter will be shared with and filled out by all parties.

Once these steps have been accomplished, the lead guide and/or family may fill out the student referral form, and submit it to the Director of Education and/or Board Certified Behavior Analyst. Please fill out this form with as much detail as possible. Once the form has been reviewed, the Director of Education and/or Board Certified Behavior Analyst will schedule a meeting with the guide to discuss details, and schedule a time to observe the student in one or more settings during the day.

After the meetings and observations, the Director of Education and/or Board Certified Behavior Analyst will write a report on possible accommodations for school time, and explain it to the guide and classroom team if necessary. The Learning Support team will also meet with the family again to explain the report, set up a support strategy, and plan for follow-up.

Discipline & Conflict Resolution

Guidance and discipline are clear and consistent in the Montessori classroom. Our guidance is based on an understanding of developmental history and individual needs of each child. The goal of discipline is to maximize the growth and development of each child, to protect individuals within the group, and to maintain a calm classroom atmosphere that is conducive to learning.

First and foremost, our highest priority is to respect and nurture a child's self esteem. Holding a child's sense of self in high regard at all times, we then set out safety and security standards. The guide is the peacemaker – always working to understand and validate the child's feelings and to restore order. The core social message of a Montessori classroom is based on being respectful: "Your body, feelings and things are important, and need to be taken care of." "It is important to take care of your friends' body, feelings, and things."

Ground Rules

The classroom's established ground rules are based on the Montessori concept of freedom within limits. This gives children the opportunity to make work choices that interest them. With this freedom of movement and choice comes the responsibility of taking care of the environment, themselves, and each other. Our three basic rules are:

- Be kind
- Be gentle
- Be safe

Disregarding Ground Rules

When a child disregards one of the classroom ground rules, positive language will be used and one or more of the following steps will be taken:

The child will be gently reminded of the ground rules of the classroom and the reasons for following them.

The child will be re-directed to an appropriate activity (“come with me, I’ve got something special I want to show you...”). This distraction method works very well with our young children.

If the behavior continues after a message has been given, the child may be asked to “take a break” from his/her activity or move away from a particular child(ren).

The child may be given a logical consequence such as “you will lose the privilege of using the sand box if you throw sand.” The child remains in the classroom and may decide to sit and observe until his privilege is reinstated. This break is designed to change his/her focus and break the behavior cycle.

In the event of a tantrum, when a child is physically out of control and lashing out, he/she may need to be removed from the class to prevent potential injury to other children. The child will be accompanied by an adult at all times.

Sometimes we find what works best is to change the environment – a calming walk outside in nature (around the playground or on our woods trail) or sitting outside offers a soothing opportunity for a private discussion of the incident or action.

Humor often works wonders and is one of the most important ingredients in a guide’s bag of tricks.

High Scope Model of Conflict Resolution

Most disputes over space, materials or social disagreements are resolved by guides helping children according to the High Scope model/methods that we provide training in. These steps are:

APPROACH CALMLY; stop any hurtful actions or language. (Place yourself between children, on their level. Use a calm voice and gentle touch.)

ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS. (“You look really upset.”)

GATHER INFORMATION. (“What’s the problem?”)

RESTATE the problem. (“So the problem is...”)

ASK FOR IDEAS FOR SOLUTIONS and choose one together. (“What can we do to solve the problem?”)

GIVE FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT as needed. (“You solved this problem”)

Mediation/Peace Meetings

In case of a child repeatedly disregarding the rules, one or more of the following may be implemented as deemed appropriate to the situation by the guide.

A PEACE MEETING between guide and child will be arranged. This mediation is designed to teach children how to work out their own problems. The child may be told “your next work or activity is to come and talk to me (the guide). This is

important and we need to talk about this FIRST before you can choose another activity or join your friends again. Then when the child appears to be ready to listen and willing to talk the issue out, the guide will gather the other child(ren) involved. The problem will then be discussed and possible solutions will be agreed upon.

Some possible creative conflict resolution methods we use are:

Reflective listening

“Smoothing over” small rifts

Storytelling

Role-playing and role reversal

Our staff is also trained to use creative conflict resolutions. This method is based on building empathy by bringing the children eye to eye and teaching the child to recognize the needs of others. By “reading” their body language we can guide them in developing empathy for other children. The children are encouraged to come up with solutions that work for them both.

Accident/Incident Reports

What warrants an Incident Report?

Incident reports are used at Amherst Montessori School to document certain situations and behaviors. It is important to have clear lines of communication between staff and families about things that occur during the school day. In general, the following situations require a written report:

- A non-accidental act that damages or destroys materials
- A non-accidental act that results in harm of another, or in the need for first aid of any kind
- An act of excessive disrespect

When an incident occurs, families of all children involved in the incident must be notified with either an accident or incident form.

Each class level has its own guidelines based on the age and developmental capacity of the children in that program. This section describes those guidelines in further detail.

Toddler Level

At the Toddler level, an incident Report form is used in the case of true injury (i.e. visible bruise, broken skin) caused by another child, or when a situation occurs multiple times between the same children. It can also be used for incidents that the lead guide feels are important to report regardless of injury or repetition, on a case-by-case basis. All completed Incident Report forms warrant a phone call to the parent/guardian as soon as possible, and on the same day the report is written. The report will be shared with the parent/guardian at dismissal.

Most behaviors that cause incidents at the Toddler level (e.g. biting, pushing), while not atypical, require action and support. It is not always necessary to use an Incident Report form; what is always warranted is the discussion of behaviors with the parent/guardian.

When it comes to behaviors and situations that occur repeatedly, all of the above apply. In addition, a parent/teacher conference will be scheduled.

Children's House Level

- 1st Incident: an Incident Report is written and shared with parent/guardian at dismissal
- 2nd Incident: an Incident Report is written, a phone call home is made, and the report is shared with parent/guardian at dismissal
- 3rd Incident: an Incident Report is written, a phone call home is made, the report is shared with parent/guardian at dismissal, and a mandatory parent/teacher conference is scheduled

Elementary Level

- 1st Incident: an Incident Report is written and shared with parent/guardian at dismissal
- 2nd Incident: an Incident Report is written, the report is shared with parent/guardian at dismissal, and a mandatory parent/teacher conference is scheduled
- 3rd Incident: an Incident Report is written, the report is shared with parent/guardian at dismissal, and a call home is made immediately to make sure that the family is involved in the problem-solving process

Parameters and Follow-Up

For all levels, the following considerations will be discussed at all parent-teacher conferences:

Guiding Questions:

- What is happening at school or in the home, in regards to behaviors?
- What is currently being done at school to tend to the behaviors?
- What can be done to plan for follow-up and support for the student?

Parameters:

- Partnership established between guardians and school representatives.
- The AMS Learning Support specialist will be informed of Incident Reports.
- If an agreement to follow-up steps cannot be reached during the parent-teacher conference, the Director will become involved in the process.

Possible Follow-Up Steps:

- AMS Director may become involved in the process.
- The child may be sent home as per the direction of AMS staff.
- Recommendation for follow-through for internal services and/or external evaluation.

- Formal observations and action planning to be guided by AMS Learning Specialist.
- Schedule of regular parent-teacher communication is established

Once a parent-teacher conference has been conducted and an action plan put in place, the student will be observed for 30 days for behavioral improvements. If no improvement is seen, further meetings will be held regarding what future planning will best suit the student's needs.

Reinforcing at Home

When a child's behavior disrupts the classroom community on an ongoing basis, classmates may begin to voice reluctance to come to school. If one child begins to adversely affect the actions of other children in this way, we will take steps to protect the collective good of the class. A PEACE MEETING will be arranged between the guide and the child. We talk a lot about how the school came to be and how Amherst Montessori is a fun and peaceful place for children to come and play. With the child's assistance, the guide will write down, in language easily understood by the child, that EVERYONE must follow our rules or it would NOT be a fun, safe place. Then all parties would talk about the behavior we all agreed was appropriate of him/her while at school. This process primarily focuses on one specific positive behavior we seek. It gets the child to focus on one positive action. This is how we inform the parents of the rule being broken and obtain the parents' support in reinforcing this rule at home. The parent should let the child overhear them tell the guide that they all understand and agree that this is an important rule to practice.

Collaboration & Support

Our commitment is to work collaboratively with parents when children have significant behavioral issues or needs we cannot meet. We will provide conferences between the parent and guide to discuss the needs of the child, and options to help avoid suspension or termination, including seeking outside guidance. The Director of School or Director of Education may also attend these conferences.

During these conferences AMS will often offer an Individual Study Plan (ISP) to outline the modifications and structures the school can offer to support the child in the classroom and school setting. The ISP will also list support systems the parents need to utilize at home to support the child's continued growth and development. The ISP is a living document, and we ask for collaboration from parents on developing and utilizing it to support the child.

Seeking Outside Guidance

When a particularly challenging or difficult situation presents itself to our professional staff, we may ask the parent(s) to seek outside assistance to aide us in best meeting the child's needs. We offer referrals to parents for the child's evaluation and for diagnostic and therapeutic services. AMS and its Learning Support Team also will bring in specialists to train staff and provide consultations when appropriate.

Dismissal Procedures

If, after meeting with the child's parents and considering outside guidance when necessary, the needs of the child have exceeded what the staff at Amherst Montessori School is able to offer, we will then recommend that the family seek a different program for their child. If it is within our expertise to do so, Amherst Montessori School will try to assist the family by making a recommendation on the type of program that would best suit the child's needs. Amherst Montessori School reserves the right to terminate the enrollment contract if the Montessori Method is not the right fit for the student, or if the student is not the right fit for the school.

Contract Termination Policy

Because Amherst Montessori School believes that a positive and constructive working relationship between the school and a student's parent/guardian is essential, the school reserves the right to terminate the enrollment contract if the school reasonably concludes that the actions of a parent or guardian make such a positive and constructive relationship impossible, or otherwise interfere with the school's ability to accomplish its mission.

Parent/Guardian Contract Termination Policy

Contracts may be canceled by the parent(s)/guardian(s) in writing with 60 days notice. The tuition deposit is an automatic forfeiture in all cases of contract termination.

Health & Safety

Illness (When to Keep a Child Home?)

For the protection of all our friends, your child should be kept AT HOME if they show ANY of the following symptoms:

- A temperature of 100 degrees or more
- Discharging eyes or ears
- Diarrhea or vomiting
- A bad cold (w/ colored discharge)
- An unexpected rash
- Severe coughing

Children must be free of the symptoms listed above for 24 hours (without medication) in order to come back to school.

If your child becomes ill during school, we will contact you immediately. A child who may be contagious will be temporarily isolated until parents can be reached. We will keep him/her as comfortable as possible until the parent arrives. It is important that we have on file the health history and emergency information form with a listing of persons to contact in case of a health emergency and a phone number where a parent or guardian can be reached.

Dispensing of Medication

The dispensing of medication by school personnel is prohibited except as provided below:

Staff may administer non-prescription medications once a parent has submitted a signed medication authorization form. Topical non-prescription medications such as sunscreen, petroleum jelly, or other ointments may be administered with written parental authorization.

If a student needs medication, which has been prescribed by a doctor, the following procedure will be used. Written instruction signed by the parent AND the physician should include:

The name of the medication
The dosage and time of administration
The doctor's name

Medicine must be sent in its original container by the parent and given to the classroom guide. The classroom guide and the school office have forms available for this purpose. Since it is so easy to forget a refrigerated medication at the day's end, we suggest having the pharmacist divide the medication into two appropriate portions so one may be left at school. If more than one day's dosage is to be given, please be specific on dates the medication is to be given. Medication will be kept in a supervised area, refrigerated if necessary, and always administered under the supervision of a guide. Any child who needs life saving medication should have an individual health plan on file at the school. With the written permission of the child's health care practitioner, parents will train staff in the implementation of the child's health care plan.

Only staff members who have been trained according to DEEC guidelines on medication administration may administer medication. Furthermore, staff will be evaluated annually prior to the start of the new school year to determine that they are still following DEEC guidelines.

Communicable Diseases

If a child has been exposed to a contagious disease, Amherst Montessori School must be notified. We specifically need to know when a child will return to school after a communicable disease according to the following schedule:

Chicken Pox: One week to ten days after appearance of blisters AND after ALL blisters have scabbed over
Streptococcal Infection (aka "Strep Throat"): 24 hours after medication has started (must continue medication for 10 days)
Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye): 24 hours after medication begins and no visible drainage from eye or with written physician permission

Impetigo: 24 hours after oral medication begins or 48 hours after ointment medication begins
Head lice: Morning after first treatment

Outdoor Recess

Outdoor activity is an integral part of our program. Both indoor and outdoor activities are essential to the health, education, and development of children. Particularly in the winter with heated and dry air inside, outdoor playtime actually has many health benefits besides providing a change of scenery, a chance to run off energy, and to express oneself freely. The untreated air allows irritated dried membranes in the nasal passages to return to normal and thus children are able to resist and fight off colds and other infections. Children with allergies also frequently benefit from a “break” from the particle-laden indoor air.

Parents, be advised that WE HAVE OUTDOOR RECESS DAILY, so please dress your child appropriately with hats, mittens, scarves, etc. Indoor play is NOT a choice at recess times so please don't put your child's guide on the spot by asking if your child can stay inside at recess time. It is Amherst Montessori School's policy that a child who is not well enough to be outside in the fresh air for 30 minutes is not well enough to be at school. We plan indoor recess only during very rainy or bitter cold weather and very low wind chill days.

Cold Weather Clothing Requirements for Infants

The following items should be sent in daily from now until warmer weather returns in the spring:

- Mittens/Gloves
- Hat
- Neck Warmer (optional) NO SCARFS
- Waterproof pants/snow pants and a warm jacket or a one piece suit
- Insulated outdoor shoes
- Snow pants & a winter jacket or a one piece snow suit required upon first snowfall
- Gloves/mittens should be attached to the coat with clips or elastic strung through the sleeves

Cold Weather Outdoor Policies for Infants

The “feels like temperature” will be checked via Weather.com each day and will be used to determine recess time as specified below.*

- Above 20 degrees: full recess, no time restriction
- Between 13-20 degrees: children may go outside for 1 minute per degree as long as they are dressed properly (i.e. if it is 15 degrees, children may go outside for 15 minutes).
- Below 13 degrees: children will not go outdoors; indoor recess.

*The combination of the heat index and the wind chill factor are denoted collectively by the single terms "apparent temperature" or "relative outdoor temperature" or simply "Feels Like". Wind chill is the apparent temperature felt on exposed skin, which is a function of the air temperature and wind speed.

Cold Weather Clothing Requirements for Young Toddler, Toddler, and Children's House/Casa de Niños

- 40-50 degrees: long sleeve shirt or light jacket
- 30-40 degrees: winter jacket, gloves/mittens, hat
- Below 30 degrees: winter jacket, gloves/mittens, hat, insulated winter boots, scarf (optional)
- Snow pants required upon first snowfall
- Gloves/mittens should be attached to the coat with clips or elastic strung through the sleeves
- Rain boots and rain coat when rain is expected

Cold Weather Outdoor Policies for Young Toddler, Toddler, and Children's House/Casa de Niños

The "feels like temperature" will be checked via Weather.com each day and will be used to determine recess time as specified below, as long as children are dressed properly.*

- Above 20 degrees: full recess, no time restriction
- Between 13-20 degrees: children may go outside for 1 minute per degree as long as they are dressed properly (i.e. if it is 15 degrees, children may go outside for 15 minutes).
- Below 13 degrees: children will not go outdoors; indoor recess.

*The combination of the heat index and the wind chill factor are denoted collectively by the single terms "apparent temperature" or "relative outdoor temperature" or simply "Feels Like". Wind chill is the apparent temperature felt on exposed skin, which is a function of the air temperature and wind speed.

Cold Weather Clothing Requirements for Lower and Upper Elementary

- 40-50 degrees: long sleeve shirt or light jacket
- 30-40 degrees: warm jacket
- Below 30 degrees: winter jacket, gloves/mittens, hat, scarf (optional)
- Snow pants and insulated winter boots required upon first snowfall

Cold Weather Outdoor Policies for Lower and Upper Elementary

The "feels like temperature" will be checked via Weather.com each day and will be

used to determine recess time as specified below.*

Lower Elementary

- Above 20 degrees: full recess, no time restriction
- Between 13-20 degrees: 20 minute maximum
- Below 13 degrees: children will not go outdoors; indoor recess

Upper Elementary

- Above 13 degrees: full recess, no time restriction
- Between 0-13 degrees: 20 minute maximum
- Below 0 degrees: children will not go outdoors; indoor recess

*The combination of the heat index and the wind chill factor are denoted collectively by the single terms "apparent temperature" or "relative outdoor temperature" or simply "Feels Like". Wind chill is the apparent temperature felt on exposed skin, which is a function of the air temperature and wind speed.

Fire Drills

Fire drills will take place on a monthly basis during the school year. Most fire drills are in the morning, but a few will take place in the afternoon.

For the first several months, guides will prepare the children for the drill and let them know that the alarm will be going off. After January the drills will not be announced to children unless a child is particularly terrified. Guides however, will be notified. NOTE: THERE WILL BE NO TIME TO PUT ON CHILDREN'S COATS, SHOES, OR BOOTS SO PLEASE SEND SLIPPERS WITH SOLES AS YOUR CHILD'S INDOOR SHOES.

Emergency Evacuation Plan

Emergency Evacuation Plans are posted at all exits. During an emergency evacuation the Montessori guide or classroom assistant will be responsible for taking the attendance book and for leading the children out of the building. Assistant guides and administrative staff will assist in the evacuation and check for stragglers. Non-mobile toddlers and infants will be carried by the staff. An assistant guide will make a visual inspection of the classroom and bathrooms before exiting the building. All classrooms, once evacuated, will meet in a designated evacuation gathering area and wait for the go-ahead by the Director of School or the designated staff member before entering the building.

During all evacuations, staff will carry the emergency backpack, which includes a first-aid kit, and emergency contact numbers, medical treatment forms, and special medications needed by children. A staff member will have a cell phone to allow for calls to local authorities to determine whether to evacuate or seek shelter in the event of a natural disaster. Calls will also be made to parents via a staff member's cell phone.

Children are always counted before exiting the building, upon arrival at the designated area, and upon returning to the building. Attendance is taken when arriving at the designated “safe area” outside to ensure that individual children are present.

The school maintains a daily attendance list that is current. Staff members are responsible for signing children in and out of the school by arrival and departure times. The attendance list will be kept in a designated spot and be readily accessible in case of an emergency evacuation. The Montessori guide will be responsible for taking the attendance book and for accounting for all of the children in the class once they are safely out of the building.

Emergency evacuation drills are conducted every month at different times of the program day as determined by the Director of School. Children and staff should practice using different evacuation routes so that they will be familiar with them.

The Director of School will maintain documentation of the date, time, and effectiveness of each drill in the fire drill log. This documentation will be maintained for five years.

In event of a fire, natural disaster, or other situations, requiring evacuation of the area, emergency vehicles will take the children to Hampshire College. Amherst Montessori School is included in the Town of Amherst’s telephone and email bulletin regarding town disasters and/or unsafe conditions.

Emergency Plan for Missing Child

Attendance is taken every morning and counts of children are consistently made though out the day. If a child were discovered to be missing, the guide would immediately alert the other guides and the administration. Bathrooms and closets and all nooks and crannies would be checked, followed by looking outdoors for the child. Administrative staff would call the parent followed by a call to 911. Once the child is found, the Department of Early Education and Care would be alerted about the situation.

Mandated Reports

We, as caregivers at Amherst Montessori School, are required by law to report any suspected child abuse, physical or sexual, to the Department of Children and Families.

Special Events

Birthdays/Ceremonies

We have a very special birthday walk for children celebrating birthdays. Children’s House and Elementary Parents are welcome to attend their children’s birthday ceremonies. Please be in touch with your child’s guide to set a date and time.

Children love to share a birthday snack with the class. We can only accept a low/no sugar contribution such as fruit salad, carrot muffins, or a special international treat.

It is a Montessori tradition for children to present their class with a book for the classroom library as a part of their birthday celebration. This act enables children to learn the value and pleasure of giving rather than receiving and is harmonious with the school's "spirit of giving" theme that is present for all holiday celebrations.

Parents wishing to participate in this tradition can inscribe the book with the child's name, birth date, and the number birthday the child is celebrating. For parents' convenience you may ask the classroom guide if there is a book that the class would particularly enjoy. Most parents purchase their child's favorite book. This old favorite at story time will hold the most meaning for you and your child's special day. Participation, of course, is voluntary.

School Events & Holiday Celebrations

We celebrate holidays from a cultural perspective rather than a traditional or religious one. We strive to avoid the over-commercialization of most holidays and consciously focus on instilling in the children a sense of the true meaning of a celebration – that of sharing and loving.

Seasonal events include our harvest festival, the springcelebration, and the end of school celebration at Look Park.

Field Trips

Children take field trips throughout the year to enrich their classroom learning experiences. For large group trips we take a big yellow school bus from First Student, Inc. When the Kindergarteners and Elementary students travel we often take personal vehicles. For many of our trips we will ask for parent volunteers to chaperone. Any parent, who transports a child other than their own for a field trip must complete a CORI check, provide a copy of their driver's license, and submit proof of their car insurance coverage. Parents will be notified of trip details in advance of each excursion via email.