

A Guide to the Montessori Method and
the Windsor Montessori School's
Preschool/Kindergarten Curriculum

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Dear Parents:

The teachers and administration of Windsor Montessori School believe that the best environment for a child's development and learning is one where the child is free to make choices within a clear framework of reasonable expectations, and with the guidance and support of knowledgeable and caring adults. The basic mission of our program; therefore, is to facilitate the development of each child as he or she explores the skills, information, and concepts that are necessary for an understanding and appreciation of our society.

This handbook was prepared to better acquaint you with Windsor Montessori School and with the Montessori philosophy and method of education. We have included an outline of the curriculum studies for the preschool/kindergarten age children. The curriculum was designed to promote an orderly progression for your child's development. The topics listed on the outline provide guidance for the teachers and clarify our general expectations. However, in keeping with the Montessori philosophy of education, our teachers try to assess the needs and abilities of each child and adjust their presentations accordingly. Consequently, not every child should be expected to cover each topic at a particular time. When a child is ready to progress to a new level of studies, he or she will be given the opportunity to do so.

We are registered full member school with the American Montessori Society (AMS).

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you wish to discuss the contents of this handbook or any other topic that relates to your child's Montessori education.

Very truly yours,

Windsor Montessori School
Administration and Staff

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THE MONTESSORI METHOD

Dr. Maria Montessori, the founder of the educational method bearing her name, discovered that children typically have sensitive periods, or critical learning periods, that are age specific. During each of these periods, children exhibit a special interest in specific types of activities and the acquisition of specific knowledge and skills. The Montessori program provides opportunities to engage in activities that match these specific sensitive periods. Children are presented with various materials and activities appropriate to their sensitive periods and are given the opportunity to choose from among them. Following their inner directives, they choose activities that fulfill the needs of these periods. In the process, they learn to make choices and to use their time constructively. By staying in touch with their innate desire to learn, they are more inclined to pursue activities and topics of interest further than would be required in a regular school setting. Thus, an ability to work independently and a love of learning are cultivated. The principal objective of the Montessori program is to develop independent thinkers capable of making decisions and pursuing knowledge on their own. These attributes enhance the quality of life and are especially important in the development of future leaders.

Montessori Program: The Montessori curriculum was designed to permit children to progress at their own rate in multi-aged classes: Toddler (18 months to 3 years), Preschool (3-6), Lower Elementary (6-9) and Upper Elementary (9-12). Children with special interests and/or abilities can forge ahead as far and as fast as their interests and abilities permit, without being held back by grade level or curriculum limitations. More experienced children share what they have learned while reinforcing their own learning. In the non-competitive atmosphere of Montessori classes, students are not judged in relation to each other. Rather, the children are encouraged to appreciate the accomplishments of their classmates and to cooperate with each other's educational endeavors. Each class strives to become a cooperative community.

Toddler Program: The purpose of the Toddler program is to foster the development of language, basic trust, and independence while assisting in the normal development of personality. Toddlers learn through their senses. The environment is designed in a way in which the children can move freely, leading to independence while participating in their daily routines of care. Children participate in outdoor play, walks, creative movement and music and gym play.

3-6 Program: Children learn concentration, order, sequence and skills adapted to their culture with Practical Life Materials. They increase the acuity of their senses and gain an understanding of abstract terms such as large, small (also larger, largest) etc., with the Sensorial Materials. Language activities and materials increase vocabulary and conversational skills, develop writing and reading skills, and begin an understanding of grammar. Hands-on experiences with the math materials give children clear, concrete impressions on which to build their own abstractions. Additional components include language experiences with geographical concepts, peoples of the world, science experiments, botany, zoology, art and music.

ANSWERS TO TYPICAL QUESTIONS

What is Montessori?

Montessori is a philosophy and method of educating children in accordance with the fundamental tenet that a child learns best within a social environment that supports the child's unique, self-directed development.

How did "The Montessori Method of Education" begin?

The Montessori Method of Education was developed nearly 100 years ago by Dr. Maria Montessori, the first woman physician to graduate from the University of Rome. Dr. Montessori developed her philosophy of education after years of observing the behavior of young children and concluding that children pass through various developmental periods during which they are most susceptible to learning certain skills and concepts.

What is the basic premise of the Montessori philosophy?

Maria Montessori believed that children learn best in a home-like setting, filled with developmentally appropriate materials that provide experiences contributing to the growth of self-motivated, independent learners.

What makes Montessori education unique?

1. The "whole child" approach: The primary goal of a Montessori program is to help each child reach full potential in all areas of life.
2. The "Prepared Environment": In order for self-directed learning to take place, the whole learning environment - room, materials, and social climate - must be supportive of the learner.
3. The Montessori Materials: Dr. Montessori's observations of the kinds of things which children enjoy and go back to repeatedly led her to design a number of multi-sensorial, sequential and self-correcting materials which facilitate the learning of skills and lead to learning abstract ideas.
4. The Teacher: Originally called a "directress", the Montessori teacher functions as a designer of the environment, resource person, role model, demonstrator, record-keeper and meticulous observer of each child's behavior and growth.

How does it work?

Each Montessori class operates on the principle of freedom within limits. Children are free to work at their own pace with materials they have chosen, either alone or with others. The teacher relies on her observations of the child to determine the next appropriate lesson or activity.

But can young children handle this freedom?

The freedom given a child in a Montessori classroom is guided and in balance with his or her own comfort level. The degree of freedom extended to the child is dependent on the child's previous personality development involving independence, will and inner discipline.

How can a "real" Montessori classroom be identified?

An authentic Montessori classroom must have these basic characteristics at all levels:

- * Teachers educated in the Montessori philosophy and methodology for the age level they are teaching, and have the ability and dedication to put the key concepts into practice.
- * A partnership established with the family. The family is considered an integral part of the individual's total development.
- * A multi-aged, multi-graded heterogeneous grouping of students.
- * A diverse set of Montessori materials, activities, and experiences which are designed to foster physical, intellectual, creative and social independence.
- * A schedule which allows blocks of time to problem-solve, to see connections in knowledge and to create new ideas.
- * A classroom atmosphere which encourages social interaction for cooperative learning, peer teaching, and emotional development.

What happens when a child leaves Montessori?

Montessori children are unusually adaptable. They have learned to work independently and in groups. Since they've been encouraged to make decisions from an early age, they are problem-solvers who can make choices and manage their time well.

Montessori children have also been encouraged to exchange ideas and to discuss their work freely with others, and good communication skills ease the way in new settings.

Research has shown that the best predictor of future success is a sense of self-esteem. Montessori programs, based on self-directed, non-competitive activities, help children develop a good self-image and the confidence to face challenges and respond to change with optimism.

WHAT IS WINDSOR MONTESSORI SCHOOL?

1. *What is Windsor Montessori School?*

Windsor Montessori School is a Full Member School registered with the American Montessori Society (AMS) operated by the Town of Windsor. This school was founded in 1986. The student body ranges from age 18 months through 6 years (kindergarten). One toddler class and four primary classes occupy the Milo W. Peck Child Development Center Facility.

2. *How is Windsor Montessori School different from traditional schools?*

Windsor Montessori is committed to providing an education using the Montessori Method with traditional and contemporary materials. Observers will note two distinct components of the classrooms - the students are working individually and are pursuing their learning with concrete, "hands on" materials.

3. *Who are the teaching staff and School Director?*

Windsor Montessori staff have a variety of backgrounds with all head teachers possessing Montessori certification. All are experienced and hold degrees in education.

Laura Casey is the School Director. Laura joined the staff in June of 2012 as the Director of the Windsor Discovery Center & Montessori School. She came to the program with over 16 years experience working in the Early Childhood field as a teacher, curriculum coordinator, and program manager. Laura holds a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education from Central Connecticut State University.

4. *What if my child doesn't make appropriate choices?*

At Windsor Montessori, students are guided toward independent learning. They develop self-confidence by choosing material based on their own interests and by pacing themselves according to their own abilities. The environment is structured in such a way that the state-required skills are developed.

In this atmosphere of "freedom with responsibility," the staff is prepared to assist any child having difficulty making an appropriate choice.

5. *What about grading?*

Students' work is often self-corrected but always reviewed by the teacher. Primary students explore materials that are self-correcting, discovering their mistakes through exploration. Elementary students use materials that incorporate more abstract thinking and require more direct help when errors and processes need clarification.

6. *What role do parents play?*

The home-school connection must be strong in order to develop a shared strategy for providing opportunities for the child's development of responsibility and independence. We do not consider "homework" to be distinct from schoolwork. Homework is the child's work, and the teacher and parents must work together to encourage the child to follow through and complete their work. Parents are welcome to schedule a classroom observation. Parents are also encouraged to avail themselves of opportunities to help in the classroom.

7. *How do students leaving Windsor Montessori School adjust to other schools?*

Throughout their experiences at Windsor Montessori, children are encouraged to develop independent study skills and a love of learning. This independent work and accountability develop a work ethic that serves the students for the rest of their lives. Consequently, former students have been very successful in adapting to new environments. Steps are taken to assure that all grade-level requirements are met, although expectations exceed the minimum requirements. We encourage a sense of self-esteem and the development of confidence to face challenges and change with optimism.

8. *What is covered in the curriculum?*

A curriculum outline is provided for the preschool. In addition to self-contained classroom subject areas, specialists provide Spanish, movement, music, art and computer education. A variety of field trips and special events present additional learning opportunities for the children. They are able to experience the arts through visits to local museums and live theater. The children are able to explore nature by taking woodland walks on our 44 acres of property and field trips going apple and pumpkin picking.

9. *What are the particulars - cost, hours, lunch?*

The school day begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:30 p.m. (Half-day preschool morning classes meet from 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Before and after school care is available from 6:45 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. Group activities involving games and arts and crafts occur during the after-school program. Children are asked to bring a well-balanced lunch with a drink. Current tuition and before and after school care rates are available upon request.

10. *What is the application procedure?*

Applications are available upon request from the Director. Because the Montessori program requires a special relationship between the students and teachers, class sizes must be limited.

11. *What makes Windsor Montessori School unique?*

Windsor Montessori offers a program from toddler through kindergarten.

- a) The self-contained classrooms for the basic subjects provide the following opportunities:
 - * continuity with previous work
 - * leadership roles
 - * small group community
 - * increased self-esteem

- b) The Montessori mixed-age group
 - * fosters self-reliance
 - * allows sharing of talents, seeing others as resources
 - * permits younger students to learn by observing role models
 - * reinforces learning of older students by helping others
 - * provides leadership experience at each age level

- c) The abundance of hands-on, sensorial materials that equip the classrooms at Windsor Montessori
 - * guarantee success
 - * recognize the variety of learning styles
 - * make possible work with advanced concepts
 - * ease learning and lead to abstraction
 - * are used independently by the student of his/her own free will

- d) The individualized program
 - * encourages creativity
 - * allows a personal pace
 - * fosters the human potential
 - * elevates self-concept
 - * develops independence and self-responsibility

MISSION STATEMENT

We, the staff at Windsor Montessori School, commit to educating the whole child:

Intellectually by teaching basic academic skills, giving appropriate evaluations, developing higher levels of thinking and facilitating cooperative and independent learning.

Emotionally by promoting unconditional acceptance of self, assisting personal growth, recognizing the interdependence of school and home and providing a nurturing environment.

Socially by encouraging unconditional acceptance and respect of others, teaching communication and cooperation skills, instilling a sense of responsibility and fostering positive group behavior.

Spiritually by inspiring a love of learning, sharing a reverence for life and love of beauty, encouraging self-determination and responding to global concerns.

Physically by assisting in the refining and strengthening of physical skills, teaching respect and care for the body and recognizing the interdependence of mind and body.

ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Originally referred to as a "Directress", the Montessori teacher assumes a more subtle posture in the classroom than the traditional teacher. Following the Montessori philosophy that children learn by doing, the teacher sets up the classroom with an emphasis on materials designed for manipulation by the children. While the Montessori teacher does demonstrate how the materials are to be used, the lecture format and rigidly structured, group activities are de-emphasized in favor of independent work activities selected and scheduled by each child with the teacher's guidance.

Low student-to-teacher ratios permit the teacher to provide support to each child as they proceed at his or her own pace with the chosen work activities and to monitor the progress of each child. Understanding each child's level of progress is very important in a classroom environment where the student's independence and personal interests are emphasized. Such understanding is critical in order for the teacher to effectively channel each child into activities that are both interesting and challenging for the student.

The Montessori teacher approaches the education process with an understanding that it is necessary to give a child enough information to sustain them while they learn the process of learning. However, in striving to attain this goal, the teacher must avoid developing within the child a dependence upon the teacher as the primary provider of information. A teacher's greatest success is to help the child to assume responsibility for his or her own education.

A TYPICAL DAY - THE PRESCHOOL EXPERIENCE AT WINDSOR MONTESSORI

A typical day begins when the children arrive at 8:30 a.m. for the morning and full day sessions. The children and their parents are greeted by the child's teachers each day. Parents must sign their child in and out each day.

The children are invited into the classroom where they begin working independently at activities of their own choice from four main areas of the classroom: Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, and Math. In addition, there is geography, cultural, science and creative art that may be chosen. A child may work with any material for as long as he/she wants. It is very common to see a child repeat a work many times before returning it to the shelf. This repetition builds mastery and confidence.

During work time, the teachers assist children in organizing lessons (if needed), re-present lessons, and work individually with each child in the math and language areas.

Snack is available throughout the morning work time or as a group activity, depending on the teachers' daily schedule.

In the early part of the school year, work time is about an hour and a half. As the year progresses, children work for longer periods.

At about 10:30 a.m., the bell is rung, signaling the class to quietly put away their work and come to the circle. The teacher usually reads a book, leads the children in singing songs and presents a lesson.

At about 11:15 a.m. children may go outside and/or to the gymnasium until about 11:55 a.m. Children who spend a half - day go home at 12:00 p.m. If a child spends the entire day at Windsor Montessori, they have lunch with their morning class then go to their afternoon class for rest. Extended-day kindergarten children remain with their morning teacher after lunch until 3:30 p.m. Child care is also available until 5:30 p.m.

THE THREE PERIOD LESSON

Edouard Seguin was a nineteenth-century French doctor and teacher who, having recognized the relationship between sensory perception and muscular activity, applied his "physiological method" to intellectually disabled children in order to help them classify their sensory experiences. In working with these children, Seguin developed a number of toys and games which later European educators found valuable in their work with normal children.

One of his developments was adapted by Dr. Maria Montessori as a means to introduce language to the young child, specifically vocabulary. It is called the "The Three Period Lesson."

Montessori thought the pattern of this formal lesson was consistent with her observation of the process of learning. In the First Period, one absorbs knowledge, is exposed to it, and watches someone else show how to do it. In the Second Period, one practices the knowledge, using it without describing what one is doing, using it with gradual improvement. In the Third period, one can tell you what he knows, use it accurately and easily, and can teach it to others.

When the child understands the qualities of the Montessori materials and how to use them, he is ready for the vocabulary through the "Three Period Lesson."

The First Period- Associate the object or the sensory impression (like color) with its name. This is generally in a simple sentence format as part of a larger lesson. For example, in presenting the solid geometric shapes you might say "This is a sphere" or "This is a cube." You can elaborate with comments like "The sphere looks like a ball."

The Second Period- Reinforce the child's association of the object or sensory impression with its name through simple tasks that require the child to demonstrate her recognition. For example, "Show me the cube. Now show me the sphere. Place the sphere on the table. Go to the basket and bring me back the cube."

The Third Period- This is the final test in which the child demonstrates that he/she knows the vocabulary. We point to the object or picture of the object and ask the child, "What is this?" or "What shape is this?" or "What color is this?"

In teaching vocabulary, two or three objects are named and presented at one time, to point out the contrast between them. Not too many are presented so that the child does not become confused. Once he/she knows those presented, two or three more are introduced. Each lesson begins in the three-period series by presenting the last object presented at the last level.

Socialization in the Montessori Environment

Introduction to Socialization

At Windsor Montessori School, we recognize the importance of providing an environment that facilitates the education and development of the "whole child." We believe the success of a child's education must be measured by more than the mere retention of fundamental facts and the acquisition of specific academic skills. In order to move on from the protective environment of our school and succeed in the world, the child must also develop:

1. an appreciation for the learning process
2. the self-confidence to question and examine the world of which he or she is a part

Activities in the Montessori classroom help children learn about themselves and learn how to work with others as they explore their environment - from the classroom to the universe. Under the guidance of the teacher, each child is encouraged to choose his or her own work from many available alternatives. Within this framework, the child's particular interests and attention span are allowed to significantly impact the pace of learning. Children are not free, however, to disturb others at work, abuse materials or engage in activities deemed inappropriate for the classroom. The ground rules are clearly established at the beginning of the year to ensure that each child clearly understands the limits on his or her classroom behavior.

A strong sense of individuality is promoted in the classroom. The freedom to pursue one's own interests by choosing daily activities enables the child to exercise some control over his or her life. However, the importance of individuality is balanced by an equal sense of responsibility for the community. Good manners are required and expected as an integral part of classroom behavior. When deemed appropriate, the teachers provide lessons with opportunities for the actual role-playing experience by the children in order to reinforce expected standards of behavior. Open sharing of abilities and ideas not only fosters the child's creativity but also teaches children to be good listeners and observers. Work groups are encouraged to introduce cooperative effort and to better prepare the children for life experiences.

A strong sense of responsibility is also promoted in the classroom. By participating in practical life activities, such as preparing snacks, the child learns self-reliance. By choosing work and replacing it after use, or pouring water and cleaning up after spills, the child learns self-discipline and develops a sense of responsibility for the environment. Older children are encouraged to serve as mentors to the younger children and to work with the younger children as they learn to master the various activities. By accepting responsibility for being an example and mentor, the older children enhance their appreciation for the need to develop their own understanding of, and competency at, the various tasks while developing a sense of pride in their ability to help others. Children also learn to share responsibility for maintaining the classroom by accepting job assignments on a weekly basis.

Preschool/Kindergarten Practical Life Curriculum

Children have a need for purposeful activity and are inclined to imitate adults in his or her world. These inclinations and needs drive the children's desire to develop their physical movements and the skills in their daily lives. Without this, a child cannot successfully develop. Zipping a jacket, pouring juice, washing their hands or hammering a nail are activities that produce feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment. ("Look, I did it myself!") In order for a child to master an activity, it must be repeated with persistence and the willingness to learn from mistakes. Once an activity is mastered, a child will frequently repeat the activity for the sheer joy of success. Practical Life exercises help children to become self-confident, independent and prepared for other aspects of learning.

In the elementary aged child, Practical Life emphasizes the development of life skills that support independent thought and action. Learning to set the table, prepare a snack, clean and care for the environment and to host guests all enable the child to develop social skills that are needed in modern society.

At Windsor Montessori, we are following Dr. Montessori's methods by dividing activities in the Practical Life curriculum into distinct categories:

- * Primary Movements
- * Body Management
- * Grace and Courtesy
- * Care of the Person
- * Care of the Environment

Preschool/Kindergarten Sensorial Curriculum

Sensorial materials provide opportunities for a child to distinguish and classify. The child can explore the relationships of color, sound, dimension, form, and texture. The child learns to compare, reason, classify and categorize sensorial impressions. He or she observes, makes judgments and refines perceptions, which in turn offers the child a greater scope for further exploration and understanding. As with most of the other materials, the sensorial materials have built-in controls, as well as "isolation of a concept." Through this, the child can notice incongruity, self-correct and lead himself/herself toward mastery.

The Sensorial curriculum not only increases a child's awareness of the environment, but the child also begins to gain skills that prepare him/her for Mathematical and Language concepts. Dr. Montessori believed that if a child could learn how to observe, compare and reason, he or she would learn how to learn. She divided the Sensorial curriculum into five categories:

- * Visual sense (sight)
- * Muscular-tactile (touch)
- * Auditory sense (hearing)
- * Olfactory sense (smell)
- * Gustatory sense (taste)

Each category has specific activities geared to develop that particular sense.

Preschool/Kindergarten Language Curriculum

Language is a means of expression and communication that is our own unique way of relating, sharing and connecting to others. Children develop skill and fluency in listening, speaking, writing and reading - the basics of language arts.

Language activities are presented at an early age with stimulating materials that give life to the subject. Sandpaper letters, metal insets for shape tracing and moveable alphabet letters all help to develop the muscular control needed to produce written language.

Preschool/Kindergarten Mathematics Curriculum

Sound arithmetic skills are taught through manipulation of concrete and symbolic materials. Children learn how to develop quantity through the use of tangible objects that represent abstract ideas. With the use of a single bead, a bar of ten beads, a plane of one hundred beads and a cube of one thousand beads, the child sees and feels the place value and can understand the concept of the decimal system. When a concept is understood in the concrete, then the child moves on to the symbolic. Montessori materials have a built-in control; the child can discover his or her own mistakes.

The math materials are:

1. Designed to develop mathematical concepts (materialized abstractions).
2. Designed to isolate the concept being taught.
3. Designed for preparation and progression through a sequence of mathematical concepts. The materials help to bring to light in the conscious mind certain concepts and items, which the child may already possess but are dormant.

Before Montessori Math

Many skills and concepts necessary for math are either introduced or solidified by activities in the Montessori environment before a child ever does formal math activities. The following is a list of those skills or concepts:

Practical Life

The foundation for all learning is found in Practical Life for it is here that the child acquires order, concentration, coordination and independence.

Order: The sequence of steps a child learns in Practical Life activities helps him learn to order a task in order to successfully accomplish it. This early success in problem-solving techniques is a critical builder of a child's self - confidence in his own problem-solving skills.

Concentration: Through Practical Life activities, much of them complicated and long enough to grasp the "concepts" being taught, the child's concentration span is lengthened. This prepares the child to focus. Mastering these skills is necessary before working with the math materials.

Coordination: Practical Life activities develop the child's large and small muscle coordination necessary for manipulating the math materials (e.g. beads). In addition, the left to right and top to bottom eye movements developed by many Practical Life activities are essential to developing an ability to read large numerals (436,231 etc.) and perform mathematical operations ($2+3=$) with the material.

Independence: The value of independence speaks for itself - the feeling of independence achieved from Practical Life activities should carry over to more academic learning so that the child is confident enough to pursue his own growth without habitually falling back on adults.

In addition to developing these four growths, Practical Life activities also develop several pre-math concepts: the sorting activities increase a child's perception of differences and similarities (equity and inequality); serving food (e.g. one carrot slice per child), the button and snap frames, and the "Nuts and Bolts" activity all develop a child's perception of a one-to-one correspondence. Food preparation (e.g. Jello) points toward the concept that various items can be combined forming a new item.

Scientific and Cultural Studies - Preschool/Kindergarten Curriculum

Geography - We usually divide the study of geography along the following conceptual lines for children of all ages:

- * Physical geography
- * Cultural geography
- * Political geography (nations, cities, borders)
- * Economic geography (natural resources, production, and transportation to market)
- * Cartography (map skills)

This is a broad picture of our approach and goes beyond what is possible for most 3 to 7-year-olds. At this age level, we introduce the child to each of these areas and build on this knowledge in the later years.

History - In the Montessori environment, history has two parts - activities to help the child develop a clear sense of time and activities to present the story of the universe and man's role in it. Essentially following the principle of working from the whole to the parts, we begin with the history of the planet earth. Human history is taught from a cultural perspective and the framework is always man's relationship to the earth - how he meets his basic needs (food, shelter, clothing, transportation, defense, communication, etc.) under varying geographic conditions.

Science - The Montessori Science curriculum basically focuses on biological sciences and physical sciences. Biological sciences, or life sciences, involve the study of living organisms and their activities. The Physical Sciences are concerned mainly with the building blocks of the universe. By its nature, the science area of the Montessori curriculum requires more direct teacher presentation than other aspects of the curriculum. Our role is to prepare the material and lessons, showing the children what to do with the materials that we place on the shelves and allow the children to explore, using the "scientific method."

Introduction to the Arts: Art, Music, and Theater

At Windsor Montessori School we believe that in order to educate the "whole child", it is essential that the child is exposed to "The Arts." We provide the child with the tools to develop a critical assessment of what one sees, hears and reads, and we also provide opportunities to create, express and effectively communicate one's feelings through art, music, and drama.

Introduction to Spanish

At Windsor Montessori School we believe that it is important to expose young children to a foreign language. We have chosen Spanish as our second language. All children receive instruction two times per week for one-half hour each session.