



# Elm City Montessori School Family Handbook

2016-2017 Academic Year

**Elm City Montessori School**

375 Quinnipiac Avenue • New Haven, CT 06513 • Phone: 203.903.4031

<http://elmcitymontessori.org/>



Dear ECMS Families,

Welcome to the 2016-2017 academic year at Elm City Montessori School! We are delighted you have chosen ECMS as an educational home for your child. We are pleased to be serving your entire family through an authentic, public Montessori option in New Haven.

We are now entering our third year of operation. Our primary and newly expanded lower elementary environments represent a local milestone as New Haven's first public Montessori program. We are excited to partner with New Haven Public Schools in order to offer more families high quality educational alternatives. Together, we will be working to provide a model of Montessori educational excellence in the public sector.

This handbook is designed to help the entire ECMS community work together in the interest of children and families. We encourage you to familiarize yourself with its contents and to use it as a reference tool. Please be sure to read and sign the *Partnership Agreement* at the end of this handbook. It is designed to answer two questions, "What can you expect of ECMS?" and "What will ECMS expect of you?" Our goal in entering into this agreement is to eliminate the frustration and disappointment that result when unstated expectations go unmet. If you have questions, please ask. If you have suggestions, we welcome them. We invite you and your children to a year of discovery and growth.

Sincerely,

*Alissa Levy*

Dr. Alissa Levy, Principal  
Elm City Montessori School

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## **ABOUT ELM CITY MONTESSORI SCHOOL**

### **ECMS Mission**

Elm City Montessori School, a diverse learning community, offers New Haven families a high-quality, public Montessori program for children between the ages of three and thirteen.

### **ECMS Vision**

ECMS is deeply committed to realizing the inherent potential of all children. Students at ECMS develop within themselves the power to shape both their own lives and the world around them; they demonstrate creativity, adaptability, compassion, civic engagement and leadership in their communities. Guided by Maria Montessori's integrated vision of social reform fueled by service to the child, we believe that the purpose of education is to realize human potential, which enables transformative outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

### **Social Progress in Action**

In the early 1900's, Dr. Maria Montessori, one of Italy's first female physicians, developed a child-care program in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. The program, located on the first floor of a low-income housing project, came to be known as the *Casa dei Bambini* or "Children's House." Within a few short years, news of the success of the *Casa* spread, first throughout Italy and later across the globe. Over the next fifty years her method evolved into a carefully organized, evidence-based approach to education. Based on on-going observation of children, Dr. Montessori concluded that learning should be active, driven by interest, and occur in mixed-age classrooms where children at various stages of development can learn from and with one another. Her advice was always to "follow the child."

From the beginning, Dr. Montessori's revolutionary vision of optimal education was deeply linked to an equally powerful vision of social reform driven by the potential inherent in children. By following the child, by attending to their needs, respecting their interests, and guiding (not dictating) growth, we come to see the possibilities of a better world. It is this spirit of hope and possibility that animates the work of ECMS.

### **The Primary Program**

The Primary Program, also known as the Children's House, serves children from approximately three to six years of age. The environment is carefully prepared using Montessori principles, which allow children to choose work according to their interests and developmental levels.

The primary classroom is like a second home, where children spend long, uninterrupted blocks of time working, observing others and resting. The guide in each classroom introduces new materials and activities to children on an individual basis. Each child then works at their own pace independently or in small groups to master new material. Children may repeat activities and make choices about the order of their work. Indirect learning occurs as children

observe the work of others and in turn share what they have learned. In this way, children explore basic concepts of literacy, numeracy, geography, music, art, culture, care of self and care of the environment. Parents are encouraged to follow their child's progress online using Transparent Classroom, a web-based record keeping system.

### **The Elementary Program**

Our Lower Elementary Program currently serves children from approximately six to nine years of age. As we grow, we will also have Upper Elementary classrooms serving students from approximately nine to twelve years of age. During the elementary years, lessons are more frequently given in groups though each child continues to work at their own pace, repeating activities, making choices, and developing abilities through exploration of their own work. Elementary age children also present and share the results of their work in more complex ways, building on the observation and mentoring skills they developed in primary. The elementary curriculum is determined by the students' skills and interests but can include the study of grammar, literature, composition, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, history, biology, chemistry, music, world culture and art. All students follow a core curriculum that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Parents of elementary students are also encouraged to follow their child's progress online using Transparent Classroom, a web-based record keeping system.

### **THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS**

Any family who is committed to Montessori education is invited to enter the New Haven Public Schools Magnet Lottery for a spot at ECMS. The recruitment season begins in November and runs through February. New Haven families may submit applications once the lottery application opens, typically in January of each year. All eligible applicants will be entered into the lottery by March, and families are generally notified of their lottery status by early April. Children are selected for admission using a random drawing, though we do have a sibling preference for those who have siblings currently attending ECMS. We also accept a limited number of students through the ACES Open Choice program. Once a child is admitted, they need not apply again each year through the lottery.

All prospective families are urged to attend one of the Open House/Parent Information events prior to submitting an application. Once offered a seat, a family must accept the seat with the NHPS Magnet Office according to the timeline specified by NHPS. Additionally, all accepted families must attend a mandatory orientation session in order to enroll in Elm City Montessori. Children whose families fail to notify the school or attend the mandatory orientation session may not attend school until an orientation has been given.

*Please note: If a child who has received a seat through the NHPS lottery moves out of New Haven, the child will NOT retain his/her seat at ECMS. The child may reapply to ECMS with their new address outside of New Haven through the ACES Open Choice lottery which takes place once per year, typically in April.*

## **LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE**

ECMS's charter, mission, and bylaws are administered by its Board of Trustees. The Board has final authority for the policy and operational decisions of the school in accordance with its charter and the charter school law. The Board's structure is designed to focus its energies on governance including developing and implementing policies, supervision of the academic and non-academic operations of the school, compliance with fiduciary and legal requirements, and financial oversight. The Board hires, supervises, and evaluates the school's Principal and Executive Director, and will delegate management of the school to the Principal and Executive Director. You can find a list of board members and their brief biographies on the ECMS website. We encourage parents who are interested in high-level decision making to stay informed about the work of the Board of Trustees by reading school publications, talking to the Executive Director, and attending appropriate meetings. Parents with concerns about the school or with decisions made by the administration or faculty are encouraged to inquire about and follow the school's review process, but should not expect the Board of Trustees to act as an appeals board.

## **ABOUT THE STAFF**

Every Guide (lead teacher) at ECMS is trained in the Montessori Method of education. The Principal and Guides are also certified public school employees who are members of the New Haven Public Schools teachers' and administrators' unions respectively. They are evaluated according to the protocols established by the New Haven Public Schools District. They are subject to the same rules and regulations, and must complete the same training as other public school employees.

### **Executive Director**

The Executive Director provides overall organizational leadership of the school in partnership with the Principal and is responsible for operations, finances, fundraising, community relations and partnerships, student recruitment, human resources, strategic and capital planning, and coordination with the Board of Trustees.

### **Principal**

The Principal is the instructional leader of the school. She is responsible for the core academic program, classroom staff recruitment and hiring, instructional supervision, parent communication, and child safety.

### **Director of Social Emotional Learning**

The Director of Social-Emotional Learning helps ensure all students receive a holistic education with attention given to both academic and social-emotional learning. She also supports Guides, Assistants and the Student Support Team in fostering positive classroom climates and works with families to address individual students' needs.

## **Magnet Resource Teacher**

The Magnet Resource Teacher (MRT) is responsible for coaching Guides in their Montessori practice, supporting the school in the implementation of its Montessori and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) themes, and ensuring magnet grant compliance. Our Magnet Resource Teacher is a certified public school teacher with Montessori training.

## **Guides**

We currently have 6 classroom teachers, called Guides. Each has extensive Montessori training at the primary level (3-6 years old) and/or elementary level. Guides are responsible for the day to day education of the children and for the direct supervision of Assistants.

## **Assistants**

We currently have 10 full-time classroom Assistants. They assist Guides in the classroom. Assistants also support children and maintain while the Guides give lessons and connect students to the Montessori curriculum.

## **Student Support Team**

The Student Support Team aids the work of the Director of Social Emotional Learning by providing individual support to students and coordinates the afternoon activities for our youngest students. In addition, the Student Support Team supervises students in our morning and afternoon extended day programs.

## **Front Office Staff**

Front office staff are responsible for greeting and signing in guests, managing drop-off and pick-up, for connecting parent to their children's Guides and/or the school administration as needed and for general office support.

## **THE MONTESSORI METHOD**

The Montessori Method is built on the belief that children are intelligent, active, and purposeful beings who are deeply invested in their own formation. It is distinguished by the following interconnected characteristics.

### **Multi-age Classrooms**

Montessori classrooms are multi-age within a three-year range. Just as all children develop physically at different rates, they also develop cognitively and emotionally at different rates. By mixing the age groups within the three-year range, the children are able to learn at their own pace and challenge themselves. Additionally, the mixed age fosters self-directed learning, independence and a strong sense of community. Children are encouraged to help one another and, in the process, reinforce their own knowledge and skills.

Currently serving students in Pre-K through Second grade, ECMS will eventually be divided into four age groups:

- Primary: for students aged 3 to 6 (*pre-K and Kindergarten*)
- Lower Elementary: for students aged 6 to 9 (*First through Third grade*)
- Upper Elementary: for students aged 9 to 12 (*Fourth through Sixth grade*)
- Middle School: for students aged 13 to 14 (*Seventh and Eighth grade*)

## **Classroom Design**

The classroom is a rich, specially prepared and developmentally appropriate environment that invites the child to active, purposeful engagement with learning. There are spaces suited for group activity and areas where a student can settle in alone. Parts of the room are open, allowing a preschooler to lay out strands of beads for counting, or an elementary student to ponder the 10-foot-long Timeline of Life. You won't find rows of school desks or any space designed for whole group instruction; children work at tables or on the floor using mats. There are no scheduled lessons. Instead, children in the environment are invited to choose their work independently during long, uninterrupted blocks of time, called "work cycles."

## **Montessori Learning Materials**

A hallmark of Montessori education is its hands-on approach to learning. Students work with specially designed materials, manipulating and investigating until they master the lesson inside. Beautifully crafted and begging to be touched, Montessori's distinctive learning materials are displayed on open, easily accessible shelves. They are arranged in order of their sequence in the curriculum, from the simplest to the most complex. The concrete materials help children understand abstract concepts. These concepts are then combined and become increasingly complex. As each student progresses, the guide introduces them to new materials and activities, ensuring that the level of challenge always meets their needs.

## **The Teacher as "Guide"**

Teachers are called "Guides" in a Montessori classroom. The Guide, the child, and the environment can be understood as a learning triangle. Each element is dynamically linked and a vital part of the whole. The Guide thoughtfully prepares a classroom environment with materials and activities that entice children to work and learn. They also guide children to new materials and challenges, but it is the child's interaction with what the environment has to offer that enables learning to occur.

Because the Guide isn't the focus of attention, they can often be difficult to spot. Typically, you'll find the guide sitting on the floor or at a small table. They may be consulting with children or observing children as they work and taking notes on their progress.

## **Consistent Routines and Order in the Environment**

Children, especially those between two and five, are sensitive to routines and order. They respond positively to consistency in their daily lives. An orderly classroom environment (everything has its place and everything is in its place) fosters independence. A school day with a minimum of adult interruptions and transitions (such as from music to circle time to lunch to recess) helps young students predict their schedule and feel safe.

Within this consistent structure, children are given lessons in caring for their environment and share the responsibility of maintaining it. Daily jobs (such as helping younger friends put on their coats, feeding classroom animals, or setting the table) reinforce a predictable pattern of expectations. The presence of routines and order helps limit the adult “correcting” of children's' behavior.

## **Peaceful Classrooms**

The Montessori classroom radiates harmony and respect. Members are encouraged to communicate with one another using a deep sense of empathy. There are rarely raised voices or hurtful behavior. Instead, a profound respect for silence balances a busy hum of activity. Students move and speak with grace and courtesy. “Let me help!” is heard throughout the day. Students work together as stewards of their environment. They take turns caring for classroom pets and plants, return materials to the shelf in a way that they would be happy to find them, and help keep outdoor spaces groomed and litter-free. How to live in a community, to learn independently, to think constructively and creatively: these are the lessons of the Montessori classroom that remain with students as they make their way in the world.

## **An Ethic of Care**

An abiding ethic of care flows from all of the above characteristics. Within the prepared environment, children develop at their own pace and adults guide that development with quiet respect for the needs of the children and their emerging capacities as learners. The Montessori method is a response to a universal plea among children: “I want to learn, but help me to do it myself.” Through carefully orchestrated experiences guided by physical and mental order, children acquire the inner discipline necessary to persist at their chosen tasks, to interact with the world respectfully, and to participate confidently in an increasingly complex world.

At all times we aspire to model good manners and sociable interactions. Expect to be greeted with a cheerful “good morning” or “good afternoon” during arrivals and departures. Mealtimes are opportunities to practice table manners, and lessons in making an introduction, offering refreshments, and solving problems peacefully are a regular part of the curriculum.

## **SCHEDULE AND CALENDAR**

### **Daily Schedule**

All-Day Montessori (Core Program)	9:00AM to 4:00PM
Morning Extended Day	7:30AM to 8:40AM
Core School Day Arrival	8:45AM to 9:00AM
Core School Day Dismissal	3:45PM to 4:00PM
Afternoon Extended Day	4:00PM to 5:30PM

### **School Calendar**

With the exception of the school start date and full days off for parent-teacher conferences, ECMS follows the New Haven Public Schools calendar for holidays, early dismissals, weather delays, and cancellations. For upcoming news and events, please visit our school website at: <http://elmcitymontessori.org/>.

### **Attendance**

Consistent attendance is a vital part of each child's experience at ECMS. Children who attend regularly will benefit most from their time at school. A consistent routine provides security for children and a sense of security allows them to learn more readily. A child's experiences in the classroom and with the materials are cumulative, frequent absence hurts a child's ability to build on what they have learned previously.

Your commitment to your child's presence in school affirms the importance of school and learning for your child. If you often invite your child to skip school, you will undermine the importance of school in their mind. This will negatively impact their performance when they are present. Sporadic attendance or periods of long absence will make it more difficult for your child to be a part of the school community. Please make every effort to ensure their regular attendance. To achieve this goal we request that you:

- Schedule family vacations and trips to coincide with school holidays.
- Schedule appointments with doctor, dentist, or other professionals outside of classroom hours.

Children benefit from consistency. As such, attendance during extended day programming should be as consistent as possible.

## Absences

If you determine your child will not be able to attend school for any reason, please contact the front desk at 203-903-4031 to alert the school of the date and duration of your child's absence as soon as possible. If your child is absent due to illness for more than one day, please contact the front desk each morning with your decision regarding your child's attendance that day.

When your child returns to school, please drop-off or send your child with a written note explaining the absence and attach any necessary documentation (such as a doctor's note). Each absence will be assigned a status of excused or unexcused.

All absences will be recorded as **unexcused** unless the child is accompanied by a note upon their return to school explaining one of the following circumstances has occurred:

- An illness accompanied by a doctor's note (*only required for more than 3 absences in a row*)
- Family emergency or bereavement
- Religious observances
- A family trip or event constituting an extraordinary educational opportunity (trips must be **pre-approved by the Principal** and an appropriate plan of study must be devised in consultation with the child's guide)

Attendance records documenting excused and unexcused absences will be maintained at the front desk and will be accessible to families at all times. Family members with questions or concerns regarding the status of their child's absences should contact the principal for clarification as soon as possible.

If your child regularly participates in an educational extra-curricular activity, such as music lessons, which requires early release from school or late arrival to school, please fill-out a request form at the front desk. The request will then be reviewed by the Principal for approval.

## Tardiness

If your child is not enrolled in Morning Extended Day, please ensure they are dropped off between 8:45AM and 9:00AM each morning. Upon arrival, all students must be signed in at the front desk by a responsible adult. Students who are on time to school will be signed-in on the **Regular Sign-in Sheet**. Students who arrive after 9:00AM will sign in using the **Tardy Sign-in Sheet**.

Just as in the case of absences, sign-ins on the **Tardy Sign-in Sheet** will be assigned a status of excused or unexcused. Excused tardies must always be accompanied by a note explaining the tardiness and may be granted for doctors' visits, family emergencies or other extenuating circumstances. Every three unexcused tardies will be counted as one unexcused absence. Family members with questions or concerns regarding the status of their child's tardies should contact the principal for clarification as soon as possible.

## **Excessive Unexcused Absences/Tardies**

All families confront circumstances throughout the course of the school year that make their child's attendance at school difficult or impossible from time to time. Cars break down, family members fall ill and everyone gets a horrible night's sleep occasionally. When these situations arise, please contact the school to notify us that your child will not be in school.

However, as a school community, we must prioritize the regular and consistent attendance of our students. If a child has accumulated any combination of unexcused absences/tardies that is equivalent to **5 unexcused absences**, the family of that child will be required to meet with the Principal and their child's Guide to devise a plan for more consistent attendance. If a child has accumulated **10 unexcused absences**, that child's family will once again be required to meet with the Principal in order to sign an attendance contract on behalf of their child. At this point, the New Haven Public Schools Truancy Department will contact your family and may visit your home. A report of Educational Neglect may be filed with the Department of Children and Families. If a child accumulates **15 unexcused absences**, this will be seen by the school as an indication that the family no longer wishes to enroll their child in Elm City Montessori School. New Haven Public Schools will be contacted to determine whether the student will be withdrawn from the school. In addition, a secondary report of educational neglect will be filed with the Department of Children and Families.

## **Extended Day**

Morning Extended Day runs from 7:30AM to 9:00AM. *Please note: students dropped off after 8:45am should go straight to classrooms rather than downstairs to Extended Day.* Afternoon Extended Day runs from 4:00PM to 5:30PM. Please make sure you pick up your child from Afternoon Extended Day **no later than 5:30PM** as staff has other responsibilities at that time.

The first day of Extended Day programming for the 2015-16 school year will be September 6<sup>th</sup> for both morning and afternoon sessions. *Please remember that Extended Day is designed to support working families who have limited before and after school options for their children. Our first priority is to make the extended day experience safe and productive for all students. If children struggle to participate successfully in the regular school day or in Extended Day, the child will not retain their space in Extended Day.* Children must apply for our Extended Day programs and will be admitted based on availability and eligibility per Extended Day policies.

Extended Day is a fee-based program. If your family needs Extended Day programming to meet parents' work or school obligations and the fee presents financial hardship, you may request a scholarship in writing via email or letter to the Family Partnership Coordinator. Extended Day tuition is due the Friday before each week the child participates in Extended Day.

## **ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL PROCEDURES**

### **Morning Extended Day Program Drop-off**

Students enrolled in the morning extended day program may be dropped off anytime between 7:30AM and 8:40AM. Please sign your child in at the front desk and escort them to the basement for our morning extended day program.

### **Regular Day Drop-off**

All students not a part of the morning extended day program should be dropped off between **8:45AM and 9:00AM**. If you are dropping off at the regular school start time and walking or driving your child into the school parking lot, please enter the school's main entrance and meet staff at the new the Children's House entry gate by the front desk and sign in. We will escort your child to his/her cubby if he/she needs some support in the morning. ***When you are driving into the parking lot, please drive slowly into the parking lot and be aware of children in your presence.***

*Please note: Guides will be available by the entrance to the Children's House (by front desk) to check-in quickly with parents before school. Please keep morning check-ins brief and be mindful of others who may need to connect with Guides before school. Guides are happy to schedule separate meeting times to discuss any important matters that require an extended conversation.*

### **Late Arrivals**

If your child arrives after 9:00AM, they are late and you will need to drop them off at the main school entrance and sign them in at the front office. A staff member will escort your child to their classroom. In the event of an emergency, please call the school office as soon as possible.

### **A Successful Transition**

One important aspect of developing independence in the primary aged child is the ability to transition from home to school in a calm manner. We have found that children have the easiest time transitioning when drop-off is swift, confident, and focused on school.

Dolls, stuffed animals, pacifiers, and other toys delay the transition process and cause emotional distress. Toys are not permitted in school. Using food as a way to pacify or bribe your child during transitions also hinders their independence. Please help your child separate from you by leaving favorite items and bribery at home. A struggle at drop-off is difficult for everyone involved. We will be glad to offer suggestions if necessary.

### **Separation and Reunion**

As a family centered community, the importance of drop-off and pick-up extends beyond getting your child in and out of the building. The processes of separating in the morning and reconnecting in the afternoon are crucial to your child's sense of security. A peaceful arrival sets a positive tone for the school day. Likewise, a stress-free reunion will help your family

routine run smoothly. The key to both is your attention. To make the transition process run as smoothly as possible we strongly suggest the following:

- Prepare your child for morning drop-off by situating their car seat on the drop-off side of the car, as necessary.
- As soon as he or she is able, encourage independence by allowing them to unbuckle and exit the car independently.
- Reassure your child that you will see them later in the day.
- Refrain from talking on a cell phone at all times while on school property, and especially during drop-off and pick-up.
- Remember that the staff member's focus during arrival and departure is on assisting your child (and you) with the transition to and from school. If you have questions about your child's day or wish to have a conversation with their guide, please provide the staff member assisting you with a note or contact the guide or principal directly to make an appointment.
- Routine is particularly important for primary age children, having a consistent daily routine including drop-off and pick-up times will minimize emotional distress.

### **Early Pick-up**

In the event of situations that require early pick up, please call the school in advance and sign your child out at the front desk. Staff will assist your child to the gate by the front desk.

***Please refrain from picking up your Pre-K child during their naptime, unless it is an emergency.*** Children begin transitioning to nap at 12:30PM. Naptime is from 1:00PM to 2:30PM. It is difficult for children to have their regular sleep schedule interrupted and it significantly impacts the napping group.

### **Regular Day Dismissal**

Regular day dismissal for Kindergarten, First and Second grade students occurs between 3:45PM and 4:00PM at the school playground or at the main entrance in inclement weather. Regular day dismissal for Pre-K students take places from the basement between 3:00PM and 4:00PM each day.

Students may only be picked up by parents, guardians or other adults listed on their emergency contact cards. Please sign your child out with the staff member at the front desk and **respect our 4:00PM dismissal time.**

### **Extended Day Program Dismissal**

Students may be picked up from Afternoon Extended Day anytime from 4:05PM to 5:30PM by parents, guardians or other authorized adult. Please park in the parking lot, sign your child out at the front desk, and retrieve your child from the playground or basement. Please make sure you pick up your child from Afternoon Extended Day **no later than 5:30PM** as staff has other responsibilities at that time.

## **Late Pick-up**

***ECMS closes daily at 5:30PM.*** It is important that parents adhere to the departure schedule made in the family's enrollment agreement with ECMS. Late pick-ups place a strain on both our staff and your child. If a child is not picked up by 5:30PM, parents will be notified by phone and email. At 6:00PM, if contact with a child's parent or emergency contact has not been made, the child will be escorted to the police station and a report of abandonment will be made.

## **Bus Transportation**

Students who are in grades K-8 are eligible for bus transportation with New Haven Public Schools via First Student. If your child rides the school bus home from school, an adult must be at the bus stop to take your child off the bus. If an adult is not present, your child will be returned to the school and you will have to pick them up from there. Younger siblings of eligible bus-riders may not ride the bus with their siblings. For more information about NHPS Transportation services, please visit the NHPS website at <http://www.nhps.net/node/429>.

Children who are not behaving appropriately at dismissal will not be put on the bus. They will be held at school for parent pick-up. Student safety is our first priority. Children who do not behave on the bus may have their bus privileges suspended or may be suspended from school at the discretion of the Principal.

**Please note: the bus is an opt-out service for students in K-Elementary.** If you do not opt-out, either permanently or for a particular day, week, or other period of time, your child will be put on the bus. When in doubt, we will put your child on the bus. If you never want your child placed on the bus, please complete a "Bus Service Decline Form," available at the front desk. If your child will only use bus service sometimes you must submit a request for an alternate schedule in writing by email or hand-written note to the Front Desk Staff. If your child's regular plan changes for a particular day, you must request the change no later than 12pm. Requests made after 12pm the day of the change may not be accommodated.

## **Authorized Student Release**

The school is responsible for your child during school hours. We must have written permission from you before we can release your child to another person. ECMS will only release a child to:

- The enrolling parent(s) or guardian(s)
- Persons listed on the child's emergency contact card

Please inform persons on your emergency pick-up form that they will be asked for identification if unfamiliar to the staff.

## **Change in Authorized Release**

If you would like to add or remove someone from your child's emergency pick-up list, please visit the front office. You may also print out a new emergency contact card from the school's website and return it to the office.

If you would like a person not on your child's emergency contact card to pick them up *and you are not able to come to the office* to change the emergency contact card, please hand a note to the front desk staff person at drop-off. In your note, please include the date of the departure plan, your name, your child's name, the name of the person picking your child up, their relationship to your child and your signature. You may also email a photo of a signed note to the Principal.

Anyone designated to pick-up a child must be at least 18 years old. Please inform everyone on your child's emergency contact card that valid photo identification may be required at pick-up.

## **CLOTHING**

### **Appropriate Dress**

To encourage independence, clothing worn to school should be free of any belt, buckle, snap, button, or other element that the child cannot fasten and unfasten with ease.

All clothing and personal belongings, including outerwear and nap gear may be any brand, but should be free of all:

- Logos (small and discreet, school-appropriate logos are acceptable)
- Licensed Characters and Cartoons (such as Spiderman or Hello Kitty)
- Pictures
- Written Messages

### **Uniform Policy**

We ask children to wear the following to school each day:

- Shirt: solid green polo or t-shirt, short or long-sleeved (any shade)
- Pants: solid blue long pants or shorts, skirts or jumpers (any shade, *no jeans please*)
- Indoor footwear: hard-soled slippers or shoes that can be taken on and off by your child independently
- Outdoor footwear: rubber-soled, closed-toe shoes or boots that fit securely and can be taken on and off by your child independently

*Indoor and outdoor shoes must be two separate pairs of shoes, please label them.*

## **Required Outerwear**

In addition, each child should bring outerwear appropriate for the weather. We go outside on all days when the temperature is above 25° F and below 95° F, rain or shine (with the exception of heavy precipitation). We do not have the staff capacity to accommodate indoor recess for children due to illness or injury. If your child is not able to spend time outside, please plan to keep them at home. Only children with medical action plans that specifically prohibit outdoor recess under particular conditions will be accommodated. Accommodations cannot be made during extended day due to staffing and adult-student ratio requirements.

## **Labels and Name Tags**

Please clearly label all clothing (jackets, gloves, hats, boots, shirts, pants, socks, undergarments) and personal items with your child's name or initials using a permanent marker or name tag system. We will not keep track of and cannot be responsible for clothing sent to school without your child's name.

## **Extra Clothing**

Please send your child with two complete sets of indoor clothing (top, bottom, underwear, socks). If your child is developing toileting independence, extra pairs of underwear, socks, bottoms, and possibly shoes are recommended. If your child brings home a bag with soiled or wet clothing, please send replacements for the items in the bag the next morning. Your child's Guide will let you know with a note if your child's supply of extra clothing is running low. If providing extra clothes is a hardship for your family, please let your child's Guide know.

## **Missing or Damaged Items**

Elm City Montessori School cannot be held responsible for items that are lost at school. It is particularly difficult to locate a lost uniform if it is not clearly labeled with your child's name. In addition, the school is not responsible for replacing damaged items. If an item is especially valuable, we encourage you not to send it to school with your child. If you require assistance in locating a vendor for a particular item at a cheaper price, please contact our Family Partnership Coordinator at 203-903-4031.

## **FOOD AND NUTRITION**

We place a great deal of emphasis on all aspects of food preparation and consumption at ECMS. At school, children prepare breakfast, cook, prepare snack, set the table for lunch and clean up afterwards. Children want and need to be included in the planning, the preparation, and the cleaning up of meals.

- **Breakfast** is provided by New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) Food Services, free of charge. All children have the opportunity to eat breakfast at school each day. Children may bring their own breakfast from home if it meets the criteria set forth below.
- **Lunch** is also provided by NHPS Food Services, free of charge. Children may also bring their own lunch from home, provided it meets the criteria set forth below.

## Bringing Food from Home

Please help us make all meals interesting, satisfying, and above all, healthy by adhering to the following guidelines:

- **No Nuts** - ECMS is a nut free facility. We respectfully request that you do not send any foods containing peanuts or other nuts in your child's food. This includes all foods prepared with peanut oil as well as peanut butter.
- **Processed Foods** - We strive to prepare only non-processed foods. Please do not send prepackaged foods or microwave meals, such as *Lunchables* or *Chef Boyardee* pastas since they often have additives and extra salt. Please do not bring or send fast food/carry-out meals for your child. Sandwiches, cheese and crackers, and rolled sandwich meat (even cold pizza) are healthy alternatives. Fresh vegetables and a hummus dip are great additions. We also recommend fresh fruit and vegetables.
- **Desserts** – Please do not send donuts, cookies, candy, brownies, cakes, or other junk food items. These items are frequently a source of conflict among children.
- **Beverages** - Milk and water will be provided. **Please do not send other drinks.**
- **Portion Sizes** – Please send appropriate portions for your child's appetite to minimize food waste, while ensuring your child's needs are met.
- **Cold Packs and Thermoses** - Please include either a cold pack or thermos for items that must be kept cold.
- **Food Preparation in the Classroom** - Please pack food that does not require refrigeration or microwaving as this can cause a distraction while preparing for meal time. Microwaves and refrigerators are for classroom work only.

## Tips for the Home Environment

Here are some suggestions for ways to bring the food culture at ECMS into your home:

- Involve your child in preparing their own lunch. Your child can slice cheese, put crackers into a container, or choose and wash vegetables and fruit.
- Prepare the kitchen so your child can participate. Your child will want to pour their own milk or water, help with peeling vegetables, and set and clear the table. You can make the process safe and fun by providing the proper equipment: child-sized glass pitchers, vegetable peelers, crinkle cutters, scrub brushes, mops, brooms and dustpans.
- Establish a daily routine. As much as possible, have breakfast, snack, and dinner the same time each day. This will allow your child to anticipate and participate securely in the rhythm of the household. Each afternoon, let your child get ready for the next day by emptying and cleaning the lunchbox. Upon returning from school, have a small pitcher of milk or water available on a low shelf in the refrigerator so that your child may prepare their own snack.

## **Celebration Food**

Your child's guide will contact you a week or two before your child's birthday in order to make plans for a small, in-school celebration. If you have other ideas for classroom celebrations, please share them with your child's guide. Preparations with your child's guide will include a decision about any food that will be served as well as other ways to contribute.

Please respect all allergies when providing food for celebration. In some cases, they are a matter of life and death. Also, please avoid sweet snacks or junk food (cookies, cupcakes, etc.) for birthdays or other holiday celebrations. Whole grain banana bread, fruit salad, clementines/oranges, or fresh berries and whipped cream are some examples of healthy celebration food.

## **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

### **Health Forms and Emergency Contact Cards**

The Connecticut State Department of Education and the Department of Public Health require that all health forms be kept current. If you take your child to the doctor during the school year, please update their immunization and medical record as needed. If your child's health forms are not kept current, your child may be denied admission until they are updated. All health forms *must* be on file before your child begins school.

Please notify the school of any changes to your contact information on your child's emergency contact card immediately. The school must have accurate phone numbers for home, work and emergency contacts. Please indicate on the form which number should be used first.

### **Illness**

Be considerate of others in your child's class. Do not send your child to school if they are "coming down with something." Children who are not feeling well are not able to participate in the classroom. Please inform the school office that your child will not be attending school due to illness, specifying the illness when you call. *Your child may not return to school until they have been free of all fever, vomiting, diarrhea or other symptoms of illness for 24 hours.* This policy is required by the Department of Public Health and is in effect for the health and safety of your child as well as that of other children and staff.

In case of an absence due to a contagious disease, visible rash, or an illness of more than three days duration, a note from your child's physician is required before your child can be readmitted to the classroom.

If your child develops a fever while at school or shows other signs of illness, you will be contacted and will be required to take your child home within an hour of the call. If you cannot be reached, an emergency contact will be called to take your child home. There will be no exceptions to this policy.

Please remember that children go outside daily except in inclement weather. Inclement weather is defined to be heavy precipitation or temperatures below 25° F or above 95° F. We do not have the staff capacity to accommodate indoor recess for some children due to illness or injury. If your child is not able to spend time outside, they should not be in school.

## **Medication**

All medication must be given directly to the school office for proper storage in the nurse's office; *no medication may be left in lunch boxes or backpacks*. Please give medication and forms to the senior staff member present at drop-off. Your child's guide will administer prescription or nonprescription medication to a child only if the following criteria are met:

- A *Medication Order Form* is signed by the parent or guardian with the name and dosage of the medication, dates, times, and conditions for administration clearly written on the form. (Forms can be found in the school office).
- Prescription medication is clearly labeled by the pharmacy or physician, in the original container, and specifically for your child.
- Non-prescription medication will only be administered from its original container. A licensed health practitioner must approve the administration and dosage on the Medication Order Form or a physician's prescription slip.

## **Sunscreen**

Please note that sunscreen is considered a medication by the State of Connecticut. Please follow instructions for non-prescription medication if you would like sunscreen to be applied to your child during the school day.

## **Car and Booster Seat Safety**

ECMS follows all applicable laws and safety guidelines for child safety seats. Please ensure that your child is in an appropriate safety seat upon arrival and departure from school.

Connecticut State Law requires infants to ride in a rear-facing seat until they are one year old and 20 pounds. Children must ride in a proper child safety seat until they are above 6 years old *and* weigh 60 pounds. After a child exceeds these limits, the child must be secured in a booster seat with a lap and shoulder belt, until they outgrow the booster seat.

Anyone riding in the front seat of a vehicle, regardless of the occupant's age, must wear a seat belt. All rear-seat passengers between 4-years-old and 16-years-old must be restrained by an appropriate safety system. For more information, please visit: <http://www.dmv.org/ct-connecticut/safety-laws.php>

## Security

During arrival, the school's entrance is monitored by staff. At 9:00AM the door is closed and remains locked for the day. In order to enter the school, visitors must go to the main office and check in. If your child arrives after 9:00AM, you must sign in with the front office so we can take your child off the "absent" list. *As stated in the Arrival and Dismissal section, ECMS is only authorized to release a child to permitted individuals. Please see the "Arrival and Dismissal" section of this handbook for more information about granting permission.*

## Emergency Preparedness

ECMS follows the Emergency Preparedness guidelines outlined on the New Haven Public Schools website. ECMS has made extensive preparations for a wide range of emergencies, including on-site emergencies, local emergencies, and alerts issued by the National Homeland Security Office.

Emergencies are stressful situations. Please know that your child's wellbeing and safety are our top priority. Here is some information about how ECMS will respond in the event of an emergency:

- Emergency related information will be posted on the school's website (and emailed if possible). If feasible, you will also be contacted directly by telephone. *Remain calm and follow instructions carefully.*
- In some emergencies (a fire, for example) the children may be walked to St. James' Church on Grand Ave. where you can pick them up.
- If we are required to "shelter in place" at the school, we have provisions and are completely prepared to do so. The school has a supply of emergency clothing and food for all the children in the school.
- In some cases, FEMA may instruct ECMS to leave the building or location or we may be told to allow no one to enter our building. Please rest assured that your children will be carefully supervised until you can be reunited with them.

Here is how you can assist in ECMS's emergency preparedness efforts:

- Keep all records up to date in our office including cell phone numbers, email addresses and names of those individuals you permit to pick-up your child. Consider carefully your list of those to whom we can release your child in a crisis or emergency.
- Respond immediately to any requests for items or information related to our emergency plan.
- Keep the school's phone tree, telephone number, and website handy at home, work and in your car. The school's phone tree will be used only outside of normal operating hours.
- If your child has dietary restrictions or medication requirements, please supply the school with a 3-day supply of special foods or medications.

## **RESPECT AND DISCIPLINE**

### **General Expectations**

Elm City Montessori School is a peaceful community of families, students, and staff. As such, we hold ourselves to high standards of civility and expect all community members to treat one another with respect and compassion. As adults in the community, we aspire at all times to model grace, courtesy and a deep respect for our community. These values are visible in small and large ways: from cheerful morning greetings and hand shaking to the care with which physical spaces are maintained to the manner in which older students assume responsibility for themselves while mentoring their younger peers.

### **Discipline**

At ECMS, we value discipline and define it as the ability to exhibit self-control. Discipline is essential to building and sustaining a peaceful, cohesive community. Maria Montessori distinguished between the “spontaneous discipline” typical of happily engaged, productive children and adult-centered strategies for maintaining “control” of children from the outside.

Self-control is a foundational skill for all subsequent learning. Building self-control is an important aspect of all our programs, but it is in the primary program where focus, concentration, perseverance, and an awareness of the needs of others take root. Adults set limits through example. We try always to direct with positive rather than negative guidance. At no time may physical punishment such as spanking or excluding a child take place on ECMS grounds. Patience, restraint, and respect for the child’s need for sensitive intervention govern adult interaction with children at all times.

When students have difficulty making respectful and safe choices and instead engage in distracting, destructive or dangerous behavior, a series of actions may be taken depending on the nature of the behavior. Each student incident is treated individually but the following staff responses may occur.

#### **Less Serious:**

- Child redirected by Guide
- Problem behavior and alternative choices discussed among peers
- Child required to separate from peers for a short time
- Child assigned seating near the guide for a short time
- Logical consequences
- Note to parents sent home and/or phone call to parents made

#### **More Serious:**

- Engagement by the Director of Social Emotional Learning or Student Support Team
- Removal from the classroom for a period of time
- Outside assistance from school personnel (social worker, principal, etc.)
- Parent conference
- Development of action plan for student, parent and Guide

## **Unacceptable Behaviors**

Experimental behavior is a predictable feature of all developmental levels and we regard such behaviors as indicative of a child's needs. However, because the community lies at the center of our approach to learning, any individual action that negatively affects the welfare of the community is considered unacceptable. As a result, ECMS cannot allow the following:

- Language that expresses disrespect for another person
- Violent behavior such as hitting, kicking, biting, shoving or throwing objects
- Vandalism of school property or the property of others
- Violent role-playing, including pretend gunplay
- Repeated failure to follow instructions or community expectations

Each incident will be addressed on a case by case basis. Incidents involving violence, weapons, bullying or sexual harassment will be handled as outlined in the NHPS policy.

## **Discipline in the Primary Classroom**

For the preschool child, discipline focuses on developing skills that will foster cooperative behavior. We invite families to work cooperatively with us in order to maintain a consistent approach. Staff members assist children to negotiate classroom conflicts using nurturing techniques that help children develop the ability to solve many daily problems on their own. A child who has challenges in negotiating the classroom peacefully will be redirected to another activity or may be removed from the situation by an adult, as appropriate.

If a child has continual behavioral challenges, the staff works as a team with the family to identify the challenges and make adjustments to routines in order to help the child develop the appropriate skills – this may include shortening the child's day or readjusting the school timings for a period. In extreme cases, a child's continued disruptive or harmful behavior may result in withdrawal of the child from the program for a period, or permanently.

## **STUDENT PROGRESS**

ECMS fosters the development of integrative thinkers who see and make connections within and among all facets of life. Powerful learning experiences are relevant, rigorous and coherent. ECMS's program transforms learning by supporting and encouraging self-directed reflection, inquiry and self-assessment.

### **Student Placement**

Continuity is a hallmark of the Montessori experience. Mixed-age classrooms allow students to develop stable relationships with adults and peers over a two to three-year cycle. This stability enables both security and growth, as the child's role within the group evolves over time from being among the youngest to a community elder. It also honors the unique pace at which each child develops, a process which does not always correspond to chronological age. Because we appreciate the importance of continuity and consistency in healthy human development, we take special care in supporting the child as he or she moves through several key transitions during their time at ECMS. Transitions are always monitored by ECMS staff in consultation with each family.

### **Transparent Classroom**

Guides evaluate progress on a daily basis, keeping careful records of lessons presented and skills and concepts mastered. We use an online record keeping tool, Transparent Classroom, that parents have access to 24 hours a day. This tool enables parents to track academic and social progress through a four star rating system. Each material in the environment is listed with a photo and description of the skills that it is designed to teach. Next to each material is a letter:

- "I" stands for "introduced" and means the child has been introduced to the material and is ready to take on the challenges it embodies.
- "N" stands for "needs more" and indicates the child requires occasional intervention while working or should be reintroduced to the material.
- "P" stands for "practicing" and indicates the child is learning from the material independently.
- "M" stands for "mastered" and means the child has mastered use of the material.

All areas of the curriculum are included as are social skills such as cooperation.

*If you have trouble accessing your Transparent Classroom account, please contact your child's Guide or the Family Partnership Coordinator.*

### **Progress Reports**

All students receive formal progress reports twice per year. Normally, progress reports are distributed prior to scheduled conferences. We hope you will use these reports to prepare for meetings with your child's Guide. Like classroom observation, they provide a concrete point of reference for discussing the nature of your child's work at school.

## **Report Cards**

We will follow the district's calendar for the dissemination of report cards twice per year at parent conferences. Please see our school calendar for details: <http://elmcitymontessori.org/>

## **Parent and Guide Conferences**

For primary children, conferences are formally scheduled two times a year, in the late fall and early spring. School is closed to accommodate these events and parents arrange individual appointments through the office. Please see the school calendar for conference dates: <http://elmcitymontessori.org/> You may schedule additional conferences at any time with your child's Guide by email or note or by calling the office.

## **Classroom Observation**

Observing in the classroom is a useful way gain an understanding of your child's experience at school by providing a common point of reference for you and your child to talk about their "work" at school. It also enhances communication with your child's Guide. Beginning in October, our classrooms are open to anyone interested in observing the Montessori environment. In order to preserve the quiet atmosphere of the classroom, we limit visitors. Please schedule your observation time with the office.

## **PARENTS: A VITAL PARTNERSHIP**

Children thrive when home and school are in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations. That's why being a parent at ECMS requires both substantial investment and commitment. Parents often ask for help in creating consistency between home and school, and much of our communication with you is aimed toward supporting this goal. This begins with Montessori's general principle: "Never do something for your child that he can do for himself." Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that a child can do for himself at each stage of development. Montessori education and parenting also rely on modeling or showing instead of correction or negative feedback.

We understand that the school and home partnership so vital to successful Montessori education begins with honest, open inquiry and deepens into trust. The Montessori model recognizes the importance of teamwork and the value of diversity. This belief will be reflected throughout the school community. We invite you to let us know your thoughts, questions, and concerns, as we are committed to working together to serve the child.

## Communication

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

Contact Person	Information, Question or Concern
Front Desk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Registration</li> <li>● Child attendance/absence updates</li> <li>● Change in emergency contact information</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Please note changes to primary contact information must report directly to NHPS at 54 Meadow St.</i></b></p>
Your Child's Guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Child's progress</li> <li>● Classroom activities</li> <li>● Classroom procedures</li> <li>● Behavior and discipline</li> <li>● Pedagogical issues</li> <li>● Changes outside of school that may affect your child in school</li> </ul>
Magnet Resource Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student records</li> <li>● Montessori and STEM curricula</li> </ul>
Director of Social-Emotional Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Extra support regarding child's routines, social-emotional needs and/or behavior (after engaging child's Guide)</li> <li>● Extra support regarding changes outside of school that may affect your child in school (after engaging child's Guide)</li> <li>● Focused Support Process (social-emotional related)</li> </ul>
Family Partnership Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● School/community events</li> <li>● Parent meetings</li> <li>● Community resources</li> <li>● Volunteering</li> </ul>
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Academic/school policy</li> <li>● Attendance issues</li> <li>● Classroom observations</li> <li>● Extended day program/schedule</li> </ul>
Executive Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Admissions</li> <li>● Facilities/operations</li> <li>● Fundraising</li> <li>● Public relations</li> </ul>

## **Parent Seminars**

We offer parent seminars on a regular basis, usually organized around a Montessori related topic. They are opportunities to share information about making the most of a Montessori education. These events will be advertised as we develop them; we encourage you to join us.

## **Updates and Newsletters**

Classrooms remain in touch with families through Transparent Classroom and classroom newsletters designed by parent volunteers. Our school newsletter is published quarterly. In addition, ECMS weekly announcements are emailed weekly through MailChimp. If you are not receiving weekly announcements, please contact the Family Partnership Coordinator.

## **Website**

The ECMS website contains the most up-to-date information, including calendar updates. Our web address is: <http://elmcitymontessori.org/>

## **Telephone, Fax and Email**

The main office is open for calls from 7:30AM to 5:30PM each day. The main office number is 203-903-4031. Guides are not available for calls during school hours, but they will return calls as soon as possible after 4:00PM. Our fax number is 203-946-6077.

ECMS relies regularly on email as a tool for sharing important information about events at school. Weekly announcements are sent via email through MailChimp. Parents can share contact information with other families in their child's classroom through Transparent Classroom. We ask that all ECMS families respect the privacy of individual members of the community and only use email information for school related purposes.

## **Getting Involved**

ECMS has a talented and involved parent body. We depend on the support of parent volunteers throughout the year. When you donate your time and talents you make a valuable contribution to the children of ECMS, and you get the opportunity to meet other parents.

Parent volunteers help to build community spirit and provide needed (and appreciated!) help to our faculty and staff. You can volunteer during the year in a variety of ways:

- Assist with parent education programming
- Work in the school office
- Assist with fundraising projects
- Participate in beautification projects around the school
- Introduce elements of your cultural heritage or professional expertise to your child's class. Contact your child's Guide to discuss your ideas!

All parent volunteers must complete an annual background check and training session with the Principal prior to volunteering. We will assess volunteer support on an ongoing basis to ensure that it meets the needs of children, classrooms and staff. Volunteer opportunities may change over the course of the year to ensure they are meaningful and productive.

We also ask that you participate in as many events as your schedule permits. Several have already been scheduled for the 2016–2017 school year. For details on each event, see the school calendar online at <http://elmcitymontessori.org/> or check with the front office.

## **Fundraising**

A long-term financial objective of Elm City Montessori School is to fully cover basic operating expenses through the annual per pupil allotment budgeted through New Haven Public Schools. At the same time, ECMS is a non-profit organization that must rely on fundraising to close the gap between public revenue and the actual cost of an ECMS education. Money generated through fundraising supports:

- School trips and special activities
- Guide training and faculty development
- Physical and programmatic enhancements and enrichment
- Capital expenses

Donations to the Elm City Montessori Fund support every activity listed above. Contributions are tax-deductible, and payments can be made until June of the giving year. Gifts may also be eligible for matching funds from employers. Parent participation in the Elm City Montessori Fund contributes to the school's continued success in obtaining gifts and grants from corporations and foundations. Each family is strongly encouraged to give to its ability and to fulfill pledged commitments.

ECMS endeavors to enlist the support of all parents, grandparents, faculty, staff, and other community friends in securing funds from a number of store rebate programs. The school is currently enrolled in programs operated by Target, IKEA, Stop & Shop, and C-Town. Beneficiary organizations receive a quarterly check reflecting a percentage of the store purchases made by participants. The more people who participate, the more money the school is able to raise. Forms are available on the school's website and at the front desk. Please help us make the most of these programs by participating. We also collect Box Tops for Education. These can be deposited in the container designated for this purpose at the front desk.

In addition to direct gifts, each year ECMS sponsors events designed to raise both awareness of and support for our programs. If you have an idea for an event, please contact the Executive Director.

## **FURTHER READING**

### **Books by Maria Montessori**

Most books available by Dr. Montessori are actually transcribed lectures from her training courses over the first half of the 20th century. Most titles are widely available through commercial booksellers; others can be obtained through the North American Montessori Teachers Association. *The Montessori Method* and *Dr. Montessori's own Handbook* were prepared especially for readers interested in learning about her alternative pedagogical approach for the first time. The following additional titles may be of particular interest to primary parents:

- *The Absorbent Mind*
- *The Secret of Childhood*
- *The Discovery of the Child*
- *Education and Peace*
- *Education for a New World*
- *To Educate the Human Potential*
- *From Childhood to Adolescence*

### **Books Related to the Montessori Experience**

- Michael Duffy, *Math Works: Montessori Math and the Developing Brain*
- David Kahn, *Montessori Talks to Parents*
- Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*
- Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori Today: A Comprehensive Approach to Education from Birth to Adulthood*
- Lynn Jessen and Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori from the Start: The Child at Home from Birth to Age Three*
- Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*
- Aline Wolf, *Peaceful Children, Peaceful World: The Challenge of Maria Montessori*

### **Books on Parenting and Family Life**

- Robert Evans, *Family Matters: How Schools Can Cope With the Crisis in Childrearing*
- Faber, Adele, and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk; Siblings without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too*
- Jane Healy, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect our Children's Minds – And What We Can Do About It*
- Mogel, Wendy, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*
- Jane Nelson, *Positive Discipline: The Classic Guide to Helping Children Develop Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation, and Problem Solving Skills*

## Books Available in Spanish

By Maria Montessori:

- *La mente absorbente (The Absorbent Mind)*
- *El niño: secreto de la infancia (The Secret of Childhood)*
- *Formación del hombre (The Formation of Man)*
- *La educación de las potenciales (To Educate the Human Potential)*

By other authors:

- Silvana Montanaro, *Un ser humano: La importancia de los primeros tres años de vida (Understanding the Human Being)*
- Mario Montessori, *La educación para el desarrollo humano (Education for Human Development)*
- Aline Wolf, *Cómo cultivar el espíritu del niño en un ambiente laico (Nurturing the Spirit in Non-Sectarian Classrooms); Una guía para padres al aula Montessori (A Parent's Guide to the Montessori Classroom)*

For help locating copies of these books or for assistance in locating other books in Spanish, contact:

Rittchell Yau  
Consejo Interamericano Montessori  
1203 Pacific Drive, Davis, CA 95616  
530-758-6340  
[cite@pacbell.net](mailto:cite@pacbell.net)

## Online

Please visit the ECMS Facebook Page and our YouTube channel by searching for “Elm City Montessori School” on Facebook or YouTube. In addition, you may find these websites useful:

- <http://www.montessori-ami.org/>
- <http://montessoriconnections.com/>
- <http://www.montessori-namta.org/>
- <http://www.public-montessori.org/>

## **THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

Elm City Montessori school is a family-centered learning community. We take seriously our commitment to serve not only children enrolled in the school but the entire family. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations. Choosing to attend ECMS means you are agreeing to a set of expectations related to the school's mission, operating principles, and policies. Those principles and policies are described here.

### **Q. What is the school's most basic expectation of parents?**

**A. We expect you to make an ongoing effort to both understand and embrace the Montessori approach and to work in partnership with the school.**

We recognize that our approach is very different than traditional educational environments. Therefore, we find that our most constructive relationships with families begin before admission. ECMS expects parents to understand and embrace the mission of the school. To that end, we help parents learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for parent education as part of the admission process—so that parents can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children—and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family's years at the school. Once children are enrolled, the school expects parents to attend regularly scheduled parent-guide conferences and parent education events, and to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies, and procedures contained in the ECMS Family Handbook and other school publications.

### **Q. What contribution can I make to create a positive school community?**

**A. You can demonstrate respect for all adults and children, the school, and the school's programs.**

Be a role model for your children. Show respect for them, their classmates, parents and family members of classmates, guides and other school staff—in short, for everyone associated with the school. Respect begins with civility and deepens into trust. Our most fundamental behavioral guidelines for the children are "Respect yourself, respect others, and respect the environment." We expect the same from adults, parents, and school staff, at all times and in all relationships within the school community. This includes speech and outward behavior. Support your child by speaking of their guides, classmates, and school in positive terms. Respect and abide by the school's policies and procedures. Honor your commitments. Look for ways to make a positive contribution to the life of the school.

### **Q. How can I create consistency between home and school?**

**A. You can strive to parent according to Montessori principles.**

Learn as much as you can about Montessori principles as they apply to preparation of your child's home environment as well as the way you, as a parent, interact with your children. This begins with the general principle: "Never do something for your child that he can do for himself." Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that a child can do for himself at each stage of development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which you were parented. Children develop a love of learning and become responsible, independent, and capable when parents' values and expectations are consistent with those of the school.

**Q. What are my responsibilities regarding communication between home and school?**

**A. We expect you to maintain an active, direct, and respectful two-way communication with the school.**

Read communications that are sent home. These may include letters, newsletters, and calendars. Inform the school in a timely fashion of pertinent changes in your child's life. Active communication involves parents sharing observations and concerns about their child with their child's current guide, or teacher. In matters large and small, remember the principle of respect. Even when there is disagreement, disagree respectfully. For more detailed communication guidelines, please refer to the ECMS Family Handbook.

**Q. What can I expect of the school academically?**

**A. ECMS aspires to fulfill its mission as an authentic public Montessori school.**

As a Montessori school, we are different from traditional schools. Our first commitment is to the multi-dimensional development of your child. Montessori children do amass a great deal of factual knowledge in school. However, our aim is for each child to be far more than a repository of this information. We guide each child to think on their own. Cognitive development and a solid academic foundation are important, yet they represent only one dimension of our aspirations for your child. Equally significant is your child's social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development.

Children are given choices and a great deal of freedom—within limits—during the school day. The choices a child makes, and the accompanying responsibilities, influence the emerging character of your child. By choosing their own work and following that work through to completion, the Montessori child identifies their own interests and develops their individual gifts. Significant emphasis is placed upon community service. Younger children learn by serving their immediate community (such as classmates, classroom, and family). As they grow, children reach out to the larger community and experience the many rewards of helping others. They gain awareness and appreciation of others and the challenges faced by others. They also gain an understanding of their own ability to help others and affect positive change around them. Community service is an integral and important part of their lives and stays with them well beyond their ECMS years.

We treat each child with dignity and respect and expect that they will treat all others in the same manner. We treat each child as an individual and strive to develop each child's unique gifts within the context of the classroom and the community. With freedom comes responsibility, and each child learns to balance their personal freedom with a clear sense of responsibility to themselves, to others, and to the community as a whole.

**Q. What can I expect in terms of communication from the school?**

**A. We aim to maintain open, honest, timely, and respectful communication with you about your child and about information affecting the community.**

There are typically two home visits scheduled throughout the year. The first is aimed at allowing your child to meet their teacher for the first time in a familiar environment. It is also designed to allow parents to become acquainted with their child's Guide and for the Guide to review key aspects of our program in preparation for the school year. Family goals will also be established during this visit. The second home visit is designed as a follow-up to review progress and to re-connect guides to the families of their students.

In addition, there are two regularly scheduled Parent-Guide (or in the case of older students, Parent-Guide-Student) conferences each year. We will also distribute a written progress report before each conference. In the event of special concerns, your child's Guide will contact you to discuss these concerns by phone, by email, or in person. In addition to conference reporting, classroom Guides will communicate with you via classroom letters and newsletters, phone calls, and email messages. You may monitor your child's progress between conferences using our online tool, Transparent Classroom.

Each ECMS Guide is a well-trained professional. Their evaluation of students is confidential and based on direct observation of your child. Guides will always offer their current best understanding of your child's progress and their strengths and needs. For all children, this evaluation is based on the Guide's observation, which may be augmented by input from the Principal and our Montessori Instructional Coach. In addition to observation and work-sampling, ECMS adheres to New Haven Public Schools and Connecticut State expectations related to the Common Core State Standards and state testing. We report the results of these assessments annually for children in grades 3-8. Regarding ongoing school-wide communication, ECMS distributes a newsletter, as well as a family handbook, calendar, and other occasional letters and publications. We expect you to attend school meetings as often as you are able.

**Q. What can I expect of the environment?**

**A. We strive to ensure an environment that is physically and emotionally safe and supportive as well as aesthetically beautiful.**

Dr. Montessori said that the classroom Guide's first responsibility is to prepare the environment. The learning materials should correspond to the developmental characteristics

of the child at each level, and those materials must be attractive to the child: correct in size, aesthetically pleasing, well maintained, and complete. More broadly, the whole environment must appeal to the child and inspire their work. Our community of children and adults comprises a social environment and culture that impacts your child's experience. We strive to make this environment emotionally supportive and safe for every child. This does not mean that our environments are problem free. It does mean that we will work with your child in developmentally appropriate ways to deal with problems as they arise. We will empower your child with social skills and the emotional intelligence to prepare them for a lifetime of working with others in different communities and organizations.

**Q. What professional standards can I expect of the school and faculty?**

**A. ECMS aspires to maintain the highest pedagogical standards of Montessori practice.**

At a minimum, all lead Guides hold a bachelor's degree; a number have earned master's degrees as well. In addition, Primary and Elementary Guides have a post-graduate diploma from a Montessori Guide training center and hold Connecticut State Teaching Certificates. Our Guides have a sense of mission in working with children and demonstrate high standards for themselves and their students.

The school promotes a culture of professional growth in a number of ways. Guides work annually with the school Principal to create a professional growth plan driven by goal-setting for professional development. Over a three-year cycle, Montessori school consultants observe each Guide and work with the school as a whole to maintain the highest standards of Montessori pedagogy. In addition, the school annually hosts workshops and conferences for professional development of faculty, administration, and board.

**Q. What can I expect of the school administration?**

**A. Integrity; a focus on the needs of the individual child in harmony with the life of the community; mission-driven decisions embodying good stewardship and responsible management; and an open door to your questions or concerns.**

Administrative team members interface with all the various constituencies of the school: students, parents, extended family, faculty, alumni, prospective parents, professional visitors, government officials, other schools and educational organizations, and the general public. In your interactions with the administration, you can expect professional, courteous, and business-like conduct, as well as mutually respectful communication. The school Principal works closely with the senior leadership of both ECMS and New Haven Public Schools and the ECMS Board of Trustees. They often face decisions requiring a balance of competing priorities. Sometimes those factors are mutually exclusive; sometimes equally well-intentioned adults see matters differently. In making decisions, administration will focus on the interest of the individual child in balance with the needs of the school.

## **THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT PLEDGE**

Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_

As an ECMS Parent, I have read and understand the principles and policies described above. To the best of my ability, I will abide by these expectations through my words and actions. Specifically, I agree to (please initial each item below):

1. Attend all Parent-Guide Conferences \_\_\_\_
2. Attend at least three Montessori Education Sessions during the year \_\_\_\_
3. Ensure that my child attends school every day and arrives on time \_\_\_\_
4. Dress my child according to the school uniform and send my child with gear that is character free in accordance with school policy \_\_\_\_
5. Refrain from sending junk food or beverages other than water or milk to school with my child \_\_\_\_
6. Create a home environment that supports my child's development through:
  - a. Establishing and maintaining regular routines \_\_\_\_
  - b. Providing work, play, and sleeping spaces that are orderly \_\_\_\_
  - c. Allowing my child to practice self-care and independence \_\_\_\_
  - d. Limiting screen time (television, computers, hand-held devices; we recommend fewer than two hours per week )\_\_\_\_
7. Share information with ECMS staff \_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of parent/guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date