



**GREAT MINDS
MONTESSORI ACADEMY
PARENT HANDBOOK
2017-18**

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Dear parents,

We welcome you and your family to Great Minds Montessori Academy! We look forward to getting to know you and your family!

The success of a Montessori School is very dependent on parents' involvement. We encourage you to become involved with your child's program, supporting the educational and social experiences, and sharing in the joys and satisfactions the child experiences in his or her own learning. Plan to attend parent-teacher conferences, social and fund-raising activities and any other events. We are always available to discuss your involvement in the School. Please contact us with any questions or suggestions you may have. We are glad you have chosen to be a part of our school family. We will all work together at Great Minds Montessori Academy, to ensure your child's success.

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

At GMMA, children and families experience an individualized education that builds the foundation for a lifetime of success and a love of learning through specialized teachers, lessons and materials in accordance with the principles and philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori.

OUR APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Our approach is based on the philosophy and methods of Maria Montessori, the first Italian female physician who founded the first Montessori school in Rome in 1907. Dr. Montessori believed that the goal of the educational process was to cultivate a child's natural desire to learn. Dr. Montessori observed that all children have the same basic needs:

- The need for order – to organize, classify and interpret reality
- The need for independence – the impulse to act personally upon and within reality
- The need for social relationships
- The need to experience reality through imagination

ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

These activities are offered when available. In addition to daily activities in a Montessori day includes a work cycle, listening period, individual and group activity periods. These include art and craft projects, special interest units, cooking, music, games, and outdoor activities. The children also enjoy field trips throughout the school year.

ACADEMIC OBSERVATION

In a Montessori environment it is important for a student's teacher to observe and measure the child's work and growth. Students demonstrate their skills as individuals during the third part of each lesson they are given. The Montessori three-part lesson is as follows:

- Part one: Lesson Introduction
- Part two: Lesson Practice
- Part three: Demonstration of Mastery

The Montessori curriculum is carefully structured and sequenced and the teachers maintain careful records of each student's academic progress.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

At GMMA, we aim to provide high-quality, comprehensive education that fosters your child's love of learning and addresses the whole child academically, emotionally, and socially. The Montessori curriculum varies by program, however the goals for our school are consistent:

- To enter a partnership with parents in the education of their children
- To lead children toward mastery of individually identified intellectual, social, physical, and daily life skills
- To foster in the children deep and persistent curiosity that will lead to lifelong pursuit of knowledge
- To help children develop self-confidence
- To assist each child develop a habit of concentration
- To instill in each child a sense of personal responsibility for the world in which we live
- To spark in our children wonder, imagination, and joy III.

OUR CORE VALUES: We believe that the pedagogical principles and practices developed by Dr. Maria Montessori fundamentally respond to the developmental characteristics and needs of children. We seek to utilize her educational principles and methodologies in all of the programs offered at The Montessori School.

- We believe that all children deserve to develop in an environment that is nurturing, safe and intelligent.
- We believe that parents are the principle influence in the child's life. The school provides a secondary supportive role to the home. It is a tandem cooperative relationship between home and school which best serves the child.
- We believe that the model of our own behavior serves as the most distinct teacher to the child.
- We believe that every member of our community has a fundamental right to be treated with respect regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, sexual preference, religion, race or disability.
- We believe that intelligence is not rare, but a state of the healthy mind. As such, it can and should be nurtured and encouraged.
- We believe that the development of whole, healthy individuals requires that our many dimensions be nurtured, including the spiritual, intellectual, physical, social and emotional.

DRESS CODE

Because many activities are done on the floor, play clothes are appropriate. We suggest slacks for both genders, and sneakers. We try to go outside to play and work in our garden every day, so please send outdoor clothing for whatever the daily weather conditions. Clothing that the children can put on and fasten by themselves should be selected as much as possible to foster independence.

HAND WASHING

Children and staff wash their hands upon arriving at school daily. Children and staff wash their hands before eating, and after using the bathroom and blowing their noses. The children will be taught how to properly wash their hands.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

Please be sure to let a staff member know when your child arrives and leaves the school. When your child arrives for the day, his/her arrival time will be recorded by a staff member. The departure time, also noted by a staff member, will be recorded as the time you and your child leave the school grounds for the day. Staff members will be happy to discuss this process with you if you have any questions.

WHY PARENTS TO SAY GOODBYE AT THE DOOR

In Montessori schools, parents say their goodbyes at the door and children walk in independently to wash hands and get started on their day. This is not to say that we are trying to keep parents out, that they are banned from the room, or that they are unwelcome, but rather, we want parents to understand the importance of the child's classroom environment and to respect it by allowing it to belong to the child with the least amount of distraction and interruption.

Maria Montessori says, "To assist a child we must provide him with an environment which will enable him to develop freely." This environment is led by the child. Adults can distract from this- we want to help, we want to tell, we want to do, we want to be involved. These things come from a good place of love and affection, but can actually disrespect a child's right to grow in their own independence. Even as a teacher, I am still learning when to step in and when to observe, when to speak and when to show, when to stand and when to sit. I am still working on becoming less of a distraction, realizing that sometimes by offering my help, I am interrupting a child's opportunity for independence.

The Montessori environment works toward each child becoming independent. I'm sure you've read Maria Montessori's famous quote, "The greatest sign of success for a teacher...is to be able to say, 'The children are now working as if I did not exist.'" This success comes from having guided the children so that they feel empowered on their own to solve problems, go through their routine, and work independently. When parents are in and out of the classroom, or they interrupt while the children are working, this progress toward independence is delayed, which is a disservice to the child.

The Montessori classroom (Children's House) is not a secret club that parents are not a part of, but a community where one's personal growth in independence is respected and should be taken seriously. This means ringing the bell if you forgot to bring in a lunchbox, dropping a note off at the door if you need to remind the teacher of something, sending an email if you have a question or concern, and communicating to your child that you will not enter the classroom during the school day.

We want to create a space where the children feel confident and comfortable; Confident that they can trust their teachers to respect their environment, work cycle and routine, and comfortable in their own space. This confidence and comfort is what enables them to grow in independence and ultimately shapes who they will become. So, parents, you're not being excluded- by limiting distractions and interruptions, you are contributing to your child's success.

DISMISSAL AND RELEASE OF CHILDREN

Please pick up your child at the designated time. If you will be late, please call the school. For children enrolled in the 8:30am-12pm Primary program, dismissal time is at noon. For children who are not picked up by 12:00PM and must remain at school beyond our usual closing time, there will be a late fee of \$5.00 for first five minutes late and \$2.00 per minute thereafter. For your child's protection, we will not release a child to someone other than a custodial parent or individuals designated on the Emergency Information Sheet unless written authorization is provided to the school. We will ask for photo identification of the person picking up your child.

LATE ARRIVAL

It is important that children arrive on time, as the beginning of the school day sets a tone for the classroom. Children who are rushed and arrive late may not be in the right frame of mind to begin their activities. We ask for your cooperation in ensuring that your child has the opportunity to begin his/her work at the start of class. Parents should not enter classrooms or disturb teachers once the day has begun. Children should arrive either 8:25am or promptly at 8:30 am. If you are late more than five times, you may be asked to meet with the Director to discuss the reason(s) for the lateness.

TOILET LEARNING

Children must be toilet learned to attend our Montessori Preschool/Kindergarten class. To be considered, children must demonstrate that they are able, on their own initiative, to go to the bathroom with little or no adult prompting or assistance. Our aim is to help children become independent in all aspects of their development, including managing their own basic needs. We, of course, are able and prepared to assist with an occasional accident and/or help a child get their clothing refastened. We also regularly remind children to remember to go the bathroom. However, chronic bathroom accidents detract from our ability to provide academic lessons to all of the children. Please note that for bowel movement accidents, the parent will be asked to come to the school to change his/her child's soiled clothing.

Each child should have a minimum of one complete seasonal change of clothing (shirt, slacks, underwear and socks) all labeled with the child's name to prevent possible loss. This change of clothing is to be used in case of an accident and should be replaced seasonally as well as on an as-needed basis. Please send your child to school in closed toe shoes (no clogs or flip-flops or any open toe shoes as these are hazardous for outdoor activities. Sunscreen, hats or sunglasses are suggested during warmer weather). In winter, children will need both shoes and outside clothes, including heavy jackets, hats or hoods, mittens, or scarves.

THE WORK CYCLE

There are many features which characterize a secure, yet stimulating environment appropriate to the needs of a young child. Safety in the physical sense is a given. Ideally there is also an intangible quality or "feeling" that permeates the entire school, emanating from the staff and present in each classroom, nurtured by the teacher. Montessorians seek to provide positive

support, believing that the good within each child will flourish and develop. Dr. Montessori said, "Never speak ill of a child in his presence or in his absence." She intuitively understood that even a slightly derogatory remark regarding an absent child sets a tone, no matter how unintentional, that could be damaging to the child. A positive emotional climate is the responsibility and mandate of the adult. To maintain that climate, the children gradually accept simple ground rules. We are not free to harm others or to disturb the work of others. Lessons involving grace and courtesy are implemented in daily life. Dr. Montessori created an environment where certain characteristics of childhood were revealed that had not been previously observed. One phenomenon was the ability to work for long periods of time in concentrated activity. For this to occur, an unbroken cycle of three hours must be provided.

1) Many children will enter the class, choose something relatively simple, and stay with it a short time – almost as though they are re-establishing feelings of competence.

2) Their next activity is generally more difficult and they stay with it longer.

3) This is followed by "false fatigue," a time when many children have put their work away and have not yet selected another activity.

4) If the teacher allows the children to take the time they need to experience the restlessness of the false fatigue, they will soon settle into their most difficult work choice of the cycle and stay with it for a longer period of time. During this time their concentration is the deepest and they make the greatest strides in the development of skills and the acquisition of knowledge. Montessori called this the "great work period."

5) As the cycle nears its completion, the children put away their work and they appear to be refreshed and relaxed as they talk with one another. When the time available is less than three hours, the great work period does not occur and the work cycle does not complete itself.

To protect themselves from the frustration of having their great work period interrupted, children either do not choose any work after the false fatigue or they choose something that involves only superficial involvement. Considering the intensity of the "great work period" and the value derived from the child's development of concentration, it is easy to understand the importance of regular attendance, adequate rest, and the opportunity for physical exercise before and after school. Your child should feel rested and physically strong when he/she arrives each morning. Careful consideration should be given to nutrition, bed times and opportunities for physical activity after school

REPETITION

Understanding an idea and accepting a concept are just the beginning; they are the precursors to meaningful repetition for a child. Occasionally curiosity and creativity can be confused with idle manipulation of an object or an idea. A period of involvement and deep integration begins when children of their own volition choose, focus on, and repeat an activity. A sense of

satisfaction and calm may be observed. Dr. Montessori said upon observing such a child, “He shows no progress in speed or skill. It is a kind of perpetual motion. The achievement of repetition, no matter how trivial it is to the adult, gives a strength of power and independence to the child.” True inquisitiveness and curiosity are expanded here. An inner need of the child's has been satisfied. In the classroom and at home we need to protect children from interruptions during such a period. Most adults have an external aim for which they are actively working. For children, the aim is internal. They work to grow. This is an unconscious process, indefinable in terms of the future.

“The work of the child”, Dr. Montessori has said, “is to create the adult he/she will become”. When children reach the state of repeating an exercise, we know that they are on their way. The process has been set in motion. Externally, we observe self-disciplined children. They are working to perfect themselves through the use of the environment, which is a reminder that the environment should be painstakingly prepared to support the children, to sustain their need for activity, and to protect their right to develop at their own pace. Parents with young children are very aware that a three year old cannot be hurried! For us, the activity is a means to an end. To the child, the activity is the end in itself. The whole person is involved. We love what we know best. We repeat activities that we enjoy, that interest us. Through repetition, children create a faculty within themselves and then create something external. The 3-year-old tracing sandpaper letters would achieve little with only one introduction or one tracing experience. The tracing goes on indefinitely, with no obvious reward or result. We know that this indirect preparation is for the development of the hand. But the children do not know this, nor would they care. Eventually they will pick up a pencil and spontaneously begin to write words. The preparatory work frees them to experience a new kind of joy.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

The Trip around the Sun: In the Primary classrooms, each child is honored in a special celebration called “The Birthday Walk,” a Montessori tradition. Parents share in this important occasion by helping their child select photographs from each year of her life and by helping her prepare a written history of milestones reached and fun times had during each year. These milestones are shared as the child walks around the “sun,” once for each year celebrated. Parents are invited to participate in this beautiful ceremony with their child.

**Children with summer birthdays select a date during the month of June to celebrate their birthday.

Invitations and Presents If you are planning a birthday party for your child, please do not send invitations to school unless all the children in the class are invited. If your child is attending a party after school, please do not send gifts to school with your child. We have found that these situations can be upsetting for those who are not invited.

HOLIDAYS

Holidays (as well as birthdays) are celebrated with items provided by parents and teachers. Sign-up sheets will be provided for these occasions. Please keep in mind the NC Sanitation regulations require foods brought from home for these occasions are store bought and include an ingredient list in order to ensure that all allergy information is provided. While we wish to

celebrate these special occasions with our students, we also wish to provide support and respect for all of our families. If your family does not celebrate a certain holiday or birthdays and you wish your child not to participate, please inform the administration ahead of time so that provisions may be made for you child.

Below is a list of healthy snack ideas:

- Fruit Salads
- Muffins
- Vegetable Trays
- Cheese & Cracker Trays

SNACKS

A nutritional (non GMO or processed) snack will be provided each day. A snack menu will be posted each week for your reference. Please provide a snack for your child on the days that he/she does not wish to eat that particular snack. Please let us know if your child has any dairy or nut allergies. Although we are NOT a nut free facility, we will try our best to sit your child away from food that contains his/her allergens.

LUNCHES

You will provide a lunch for your child. Feel free to send items that can be warmed up (Ex: leftovers from last night's dinner). We will warm up your child's lunch for up to 45 seconds. Please refrain from sending items that need preparation such as TV dinners, raviolis etc. When packing your child's lunch, please pack healthy and nutritious meals for him/her. A well balanced diet incorporates all of the food groups. We ask that you do not send cookies, potato chips, cake, pies or candy. Feel free to contact us about healthy lunch ideas for your little one. We will be happy to provide some for you.

INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

Great Minds Montessori Academy follows Wake County's closing and delays. In the case of inclement weather, please check WRAL or ABC11 for information regarding our school closings. In the event of an early dismissal, parents will be notified via phone at the number(s) they have listed on their child's emergency form.

***Credit will not be given or days rescheduled due to school closing for inclement weather unless there are extenuating circumstances.

PARENT OBSERVATIONS

All parents are welcome and encouraged to observe our classrooms. Seeing the children at work is to experience the Montessori philosophy in action.

To make your observation more meaningful: take a look around the room and notice the amount and diversity of activity; the range of ages; the types of materials; the individual and group activity; and the interaction of the children.

Focus your attention on the teacher and notice the composure, the teacher as observer, and the respect the teacher shows each child.

Focus your attention on your child and notice the succession of activities; the concentration on work; enthusiasm and self-satisfaction in each activity; and the child's respect for other children, the materials, and the teachers.

** If you would like to observe a class, we ask that you make arrangements with the classroom teacher and/or our Director in advance to minimize disruption to the classroom and to make sure that the students will be in the room when you visit. Observation times begin after the classroom has been normalized (a Montessori term that describes when the children are comfortable and secure in their environment. This is the time when students will feel comfortable enough to have outsiders visit their classroom.

**When you arrive for your observation, please sign in at the office. Please let your child know, in advance, that you will be observing and that she/he will need to carry on as usual and cannot converse with you while you are there.

During a formal in-class observation, we request that you adhere to the following guidelines:

- Sit quietly in the observation chairs indicated; try not to make your presence felt.
- Do not initiate conversation; and do not handle the materials.
- Do not ask teacher(s) questions.
- Do not correct your child's work.

We recommend these guidelines to minimize interference in the children's peaceful environment. Feel free to make notes of items you would like to discuss during your conference with the classroom teacher.

PORTFOLIOS

Even though young children tend to be much more interested in the process of work than in tangible products, even four and five year-olds tend to produce enough to create an impressive collection as the months go by. Remember to check your child's folder regularly for math work, language activities, drawings, and other papers your child chooses to bring home.

We will keep samples of work from the year into a permanent portfolio binder. We will add photographs that we've taken of your child and his/her friends over the year, some poetry, and a little note to your child reminding him of the high points of the year.

THE THREE YEAR CYCLE

The Montessori primary (preschool) program is a three year cycle. Children begin at three years of age in the primary (preschool). We have found children adjust and access the Montessori environment much more successfully when they attend five days a week. Pre-school aged children especially need consistency. They bond socially more readily with the other children.

They also tend to progress through the full spectrum of materials in the five day format. Developmentally it is beneficial for children to experience the full three year cycle.
**Two and Three day programs are only available to three and four year olds.

SCHOOL SCHEDULE

Classroom Daily Schedule

7:00-8:25 AM- Early Morning Care/Wash Hands

8:25-8:30 AM- School Day Arrival/ Handwashing

8:35-9:00 AM - Circle Time I- Reading/ Group Lessons/ Calendar etc.

9:05-9:15 AM – Morning Snack Served (wash hands prior and after)

9:00-10:45 AM- Morning Work Cycle- Individual & Group Lessons

10:45-11:00 AM- Clean up, Bathroom and Wash Hands

Circle Time II

11:00-11:55 AM- Outdoor Play and Gardening (Weather permitting)

11:55 AM-12:05PM- Half Day Students- Bathroom/Wash Hands/ Dismissal

Full Day Students Bathroom/Wash Hands/ Prep for Lunch

12-12:40- Enjoy Lunch

12:45-1:00 PM Clean up/ Wash Hands and Set up Cots

1:00-2:45 PM Nap Time (Third Years-1:00-2:15 PM)

2:15-3:00PM-Third Years Work Cycle

2:45-3:05 PM- Clean up and Put Cots & Bedding away/ Bathroom/ Handwashing

3:05-3:15 PM Afternoon Snack/Wash Hands

3:15-3:30 PM Circle Time-Recap of our Day/Dismissal

3:30-6:00 PM-After School Care-Outdoor Play/Gardening (Weather Permitting) Crafts, Games & Student Dismissal

6:00 PM- After School Care Dismissal

ACADEMIC READINESS

Academic readiness is not an issue at GMMA. In the preschool program your child will not be evaluated as one of the criteria for enrollment. Whether your child knows colors or numbers is irrelevant. Of greater importance, the teacher is concerned about the whole child: his/her ability to communicate and to cooperate, and eagerness to accept and seek out new experiences. Do not attempt to push your child into "readiness." Make new experiences available, but do not attempt to force him/her inappropriately. This kind of pressure can produce anxiety and cause some fear. We will conduct academic assessments for each child to help us better plan lessons that will encourage academic development.

SPECIAL SERVICES

Occasionally a child may evidence the need for special services. These needs may be physical, developmental or psychological. We have been working with children for a long time. We are trained to spot needs that affect the child's ability to learn and socialize successfully in a classroom setting. However, we are not trained to diagnose children. We will recommend evaluation and professional consultation. We will provide a free speech and language screening and the screening company will give you the results of their findings. The school does not contact or contract for outside services. It is the decision and responsibility of the parents to make those arrangements. We make every attempt to provide space for private tutoring and other services contracted for by parents with other organizations. However, we have limited space. All requests for private tutoring space must be made in the office unless the therapists prefer to work with the child within his class environment.

PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES

Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled in late fall and mid spring. Parents are given the opportunity to select a convenient time for the conference. Sign-up sheets will be available for your convenience. We believe good communication between home and school is essential to the best learning environment for the child. Our teachers will periodically make personal phone calls throughout the school year. There may be times when a parent or teacher request a conference outside of the formal conference days. In those circumstances, parents and teachers will need to work together to find a time in which both are available to meet.

SHOW & TELL

Show and tell will be every Friday. It isn't just about giving the kids a reason to bringing something to class; each child's social, emotional and language skills will grow and develop from this activity as the children learn to use descriptive language, practice listening skills and share their special items with others.

Sharing prized possessions with peers makes for a fun and comfortable learning arena for everyone involved. Show and tell in the classroom can help strengthen the children's oral skills, especially if it is a structured activity. Show and tell helps foster public speaking skills and helps children feel comfortable with talking in front of a group of peers. When it is structured as a question and answer activity, show and tell encourages the children to use descriptive words and full sentences. Questions like "Why is this special to you?" "How does this work?" or "Where did you get this object?" help the children to strengthen their descriptive skills. This activity also helps children to learn to communicate feelings, thoughts and emotions with words.

- We ask that you refrain from sending toys or stuffed animals to school for show & tell. Items need to be of educational value. Examples: pictures from a vacation or outing, items collected from the outdoors (sea shells, acorns, leaves, an empty bird's nest or special rocks), special gifts from family members, a game that they learned to do, a picture or painting that they are proud of, or a new trick that they learned.
- Please note that if your child has forgotten his/her item at home, it is not your responsibility to go back to get it. Encourage your child to tell the class about something special that has happened to him/her. Explain to him/her that it is okay to forget items and that he/she should make sure he/she remembers to bring it the next time. Doing this teaches the child about logical consequences and that he/she is responsible for his/her actions as well.
- Any item brought to school for Show & Tell must be kept in your child's cubby labeled with his/her name. It will be kept there until it is picked up at the end of the day.
- Please refrain from sending in live animals for show and tell. There are some exceptions so please let the teacher know prior to bringing it in to school.

CHILDREN'S PERSONAL FILES

Student files are confidential records and are kept secure from unauthorized access. Parents may have access to the child's file by written request at least 24 hours in advance. The file must be viewed in the presence of a Great Minds Montessori Academy administrator, and if they disagree with any item in the file, a note may be inserted into the permanent file with their comments.

Officials of the Health Department, Department of Social Services and Department of Child Development may have the right to review student files without the parents' permission. However, with a written court order, other government officials may inspect the contents of a student's file without the permission of the student or parent, and the school will inform the student and his family in writing that such an inspection has been requested or made.

A copy of the student's file may be sent to an outside professional, such as a psychologist or educational diagnostician, if requested in writing by the parent or guardian with notation of pertinent papers to be sent.

HEALTH POLICY

To protect children and staff from exposure to infections and contagious disease, the Montessori Teaching Staff or Director will contact you to come and take your child home if your child exhibits any of these conditions during the school day:

Key criteria for exclusion of children who are ill

- The illness results in a need for care that is greater than the staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of other children;
- An acute change in behavior – this could include lethargy/lack of responsiveness, irritability, persistent crying, difficult breathing, or having a quickly spreading rash;
- Fever: Temperature above 100°F orally, or 99°F or higher taken axillary (armpit) or measured by an equivalent method, AND accompanied by behavior change.

* Other signs and symptoms include: sore throat, rash, yellow or green mucus from eyes or nose, vomiting, diarrhea, breathing difficulty or excessive coughing. These are signs that the child is too ill to participate in program activities.

* In addition, if your child has a communicable disease e.g., mumps, strep, chicken pox, hepatitis, pneumonia, measles, rubella, scarlet fever, scabies, pertussis, influenza, encephalitis, head lice or meningitis you must report this to the school office immediately. We are a nit free facility so if your child has head lice, he/she may not return to school unless he/she is clear of nits.

MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION

Any medicine that is brought to school must be brought to the office. It cannot be kept in your child's bag or snack box. There are some things you must know about how we handle medications. These policies are for the protection of your child.

A medication authorization form must be filled out, which includes the length of time the medication is to be dispensed. These medication authorization forms (available in the office) must be completed and signed before the administrator can give your child medicine. One form needs to be completed for each medication your child is taking. We may only administer Epi-pens, nebulizers, Benadryl or inhalers. We cannot administer cough or cold medicine, antibiotics or antacids. Lip balms and sunscreens are treated as medication. Parents will need to fill out a permission form to have these items applied on their child(ren).

PARENT INFORMATION

Parents or their authorized emergency contacts will be notified immediately of any accidents, injuries or illnesses. Behavioral incidents will be communicated on a case by case basis depending on the seriousness of the incident. The classroom teacher will determine this and will communicate with you either immediately by phone or at the end of the school day for less serious matters.

EMPLOYEE SCREENING

All employees are subject to criminal screening through the State/Federal agencies and/or fingerprinted as mandated by the State of North Carolina. All volunteers must complete a criminal background check are screened for abuse and child neglect.

PERSONAL POSSESSIONS

Children often want to bring favorite possessions to school, but we ask parents to discourage this practice. We welcome books, items made by the child, or objects related to culture, science, or nature. Sharing these items with other children in the class will become a part of the classroom learning experience. If your child asks to bring a toy or other personal property, simply explain that such items are not allowed at school. Please do not send valuables, including money and label all items that are sent to school.

COMMUNICATION

Most of the communication coming from the school will be disseminated electronically. It is essential that we have your email address and that you keep us current if that address changes. Please make certain to read the weekly electronic newsletter as it contains important information about your child's classroom as well as school-wide information.

School Calendar: The calendar of events for the school year is available on our website: (www.greatmindsmontessoriacademy.org) Changes and updates are made monthly on the calendar and are also communicated to you through our weekly electronic newsletter.

Voicemail: The main telephone numbers at each campus have voice mail capabilities. Voicemail is also convenient for leaving us after-hour messages. We check voice mail regularly throughout the day. **Email:** In our ongoing efforts to be more conscientious in the use of resources, most communication between the school and home will be made electronically. All regular correspondence from the school will be sent via email. If you are not receiving our weekly eNews (electronic newsletter) or other email communication from us please inform the office or email your correct email address to us. All head teachers and administrative staff members have an e-mail address. Questions, suggestions and other communications can be initiated via the Internet using a standard addressing format. Our school is also part of Facebook. We encourage you to 'Like' us on Facebook and to share our information with your community of family and friends. **Shutterfly:** Our school will be participating in a secure website where activities, pictures and news will be posted. Opportunities to sign up for volunteer opportunities will be posted as well. Please note that this site is secure and cannot be accessed by anyone other than those who are invited to join. Sometimes parents request that grandparents have access to the site so that they are able to see their grandchildren participating in school functions. If this is the case, we will need a written permission with the grandparents name and email address in order to add them to our site.

***Changes of address or emergency contact information:** Whenever you change your address, home phone, work phone or emergency notification information, be sure to let the classroom teacher know. In addition, be sure to notify the school office directly. Please do not rely on your child's teacher to update the office. It is only by alerting both the teacher and the office to any changes that you can be sure we will change all documentation at school. This includes our Child Information Sheet, billing list, mailing lists and classroom files. Both the office and the teacher emergency records need to be up to-date.

CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT

All schools, child care centers, physicians and others who work with children are required by law to inform Child Protective Services at the Department of Human Services of any suspected abuse or neglect of children. By law, a suspicion of child abuse generally means that the reporter has “reasonable cause to believe” or “reasonable cause to know or suspect” that a child is being maltreated physically, emotionally or mentally. We will NOT release child and will contact Child Protective Services if (but not limited to)

- Parent showing signs of intoxication from alcohol or controlled substance
- Has not picked up child more than 30 minutes late without a phone call or an explanation. This is a form of abandonment
- Child shows sign of sexual abuse
- Child shows signs of physical abuse: cigarette burns, human bite marks, fractures in various stages of healing, clustered injuries that form a pattern,
- Child reports being injured by parents
- Child is frightened by parents
- Parent uses harsh discipline inappropriate to age of the child
- Parent demonstrates insufficient parenting skills or displays poor coping skills
- Parent has anger management skill
- Parent threatens child, students or staff members with physical harm or injury

DISPUTES

Occasionally there might be issues, misunderstandings, conflicts, or communication confusion between parents and the school. If you have questions or concerns that you want to address, please start by contacting your child’s classroom teacher. You may schedule a meeting if you wish. If you are not comfortable with the outcome of that meeting, you are encouraged to contact the Director. At some point, the Head teacher may feel a need to meet with you about your child’s development. If so, she will arrange a meeting time with you that is convenient for all parties. She may request that the Director attend that meeting.

CHILD CUSTODY ISSUES

GMMA is dedicated to the total development of each unique child. We believe that all children need a loving, supportive family. When a family separates, it is especially difficult for the children. Their loyalties are torn as they love and need both parents. The school will be supportive, open, and welcoming to both parents. We will remain neutral in conflicts between parents. School records, conferences, meeting information, educational materials and similar items are available to both parents. Parents should try to schedule joint conferences with the teacher, but accommodations can be made for separate conferences. Parents, regardless of the custody arrangement, are entitled to information about the activities of the school and access to certain records. These records include: medical, dental and school records, day care provider's records, and notification of meetings regarding the child's education. The school will not limit a parent's access to his/her child unless there is a court order on file in the child's

records at the school limiting or specifying particular conditions for a parent's access to the child.

FUNDRAISING

Great Minds Montessori Academy looks beyond tuition income to voluntary contributions from families and friends of the school who want to invest in the school's development. We offer several fundraising opportunities throughout the school year. Our on-going fundraisers include participation in Box Tops for Education, we link super market cards to our school and also participate in other fundraising programs as well. Please try to participate in as many fundraisers as possible. Your contribution to this cause is beneficial to the school.

FIELD TRIPS

We will periodically take field trips to local points of interest during the year, which may involve a small fee. Field Trips are planned to coordinate with subjects being studied by a class or take advantage of special community events. Notice of upcoming events will be sent home in advance. Parents are invited to participate as chaperones in these activities. You will always be notified of any trips scheduled for your child's class. Transportation will be by family vehicles. Our school field trip t-shirt must be worn on field trips. Parents must sign a permission slip before any child is allowed to participate in a field trip. If you volunteer to transport children, you will have to provide your car insurance declaration to keep on file.

RULES FOR VEHICLE SAFETY DURING FIELD TRIPS

All of the normal school rules apply when in the school vehicle. In addition, please be sure you understand and can support the following basic safety rules. Safety is our prime concern and we must insist that every student follow certain rules of safe and courteous conduct while riding in our families' vehicles.

- Wear your seat belt at all times.
- Stay in your seat at all times while the vehicle is moving.
- Don't leave your seat to get off until the vehicle has come to a complete stop.
- For everyone's safety, do not shout, engage in horseplay, or switch seats during the trip.
- Never stick your hand (or anything else) out of the vehicle window.
- Never throw anything out of the vehicle.
- Do not play with sharp objects, such as pens or pencils, in the vehicle.
- Do not eat or drink in the vehicle.
- Every student is expected to set a good example for the other children.
- Every student is expected to be respectful of the adults in the vehicle

VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS

Each family is required to contribute 15 hours of parent participation work per year. The volunteer log book is located in the office or you can email your hours to the administrators. In the log book record the date, the task, who completed it, and the number of hours (or amount spent) in the appropriate columns. A fee of \$10 per hour will be assessed at the end of the school year for any outstanding volunteer hours (Excess hours cannot be carried over to the next school year). There will be numerous volunteer opportunities throughout the year. These may include, chaperoning on field trips, helping in the garden, building or sewing materials, cutting laminated materials, conducting an in-class presentation, helping with fundraising, starting or managing a PSA (parent Staff Association), serving as a class parent, assisting with class presentations or parties, or doing general office work. There will be sign-up sheets available when these opportunities arise. Below is a list of guidelines for volunteering at GMMA.

- **The role of the Great Minds Montessori Academy volunteer** – Volunteers are important role models and should be respectful and set good examples for Montessori students. Loud voices and inappropriate language should not be used at school. While volunteering, it is not appropriate to hold private conversations with teachers or other volunteers. A good volunteer communicates openly with the Montessori teacher and frees the teacher to teach. Unless it is an emergency, the volunteer should not interrupt the teacher while she is working with her students.
- **A discussion on commitment** – Volunteers should plan to arrive a bit early for their scheduled tasks in order to receive some direction. If for some reason, the volunteer is unable to attend, s/he should contact the person in charge as soon as possible in order to provide ample time to organize a replacement volunteer. The GMMA also has a commitment to be prepared and to respect the time and talent of the volunteer.
- **Childcare** – Volunteers should not bring younger children with them. Their focus should be on the children in their care and the job at hand.
- **Reporting child abuse and neglect** – Just as with teachers and administrators, school volunteers are required by law to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect. If the volunteer suspects child abuse or neglect, they need to report it immediately and confidentially to the GMMA teacher or administrator.
- **Transportation of students** – Volunteers should not transport students without prior permission.
- **Confidentiality** – Volunteers, like teachers, are bound by strict rules of confidentiality. What is said or heard during volunteer hours at GMMA or a school function is to be kept confidential in order to respect and protect students and teachers.

Volunteer Opportunities include, but are not limited to:

Field trip chaperones/drivers, garden helpers, builders who are handy with woodworking or minor repairs, crafty person who can sew, help prep for events, take Mr. Fuzzy home on

holidays or school closings, or assisting with copying or laminating.

GROUND RULES

As a school founded on the Montessori ideals, we assume that every person deserves respect. Great Minds Montessori Academy expects students to demonstrate kindness, courtesy, and respect toward the school and fellow students, parents, teachers, and staff. The goal of all Montessori education is to establish safe, warm, caring environments within which we teach students positive and appropriate ways to handle situations. Rather than assume misbehavior and punishment are inevitable, students develop a strong sense of self-discipline, responsibility and courtesy. We work together to create a system of ground rules and discipline that is firm, fair, and consistent in order to help students maintain the school's values and character. Please review these rules with your child:

- Be kind and gentle to one another.
- Everyone here has a right to concentration and privacy. Please do not disturb anyone who is trying to concentrate on his or her work.
- Everyone here has a right to his or her personal belongings. Please do not touch anything that is not yours without the owner's permission. If you accidentally lose or break something, please replace it without a fuss.
- Everyone here has the right to feel safe and secure. Please don't express anger or upset feelings in a way that insults or threatens someone else.
- Everyone here has the right to be physically safe. Please don't do anything that might hurt or endanger anyone.
- No one here is allowed to fight, push, trip, or use any other aggressive behavior.
- Use the outdoor equipment as intended.
- Let everyone who wants to play join in your games.
- Stop chasing or playing scary games when asked.
- Please don't tackle or trip one another in any games.
- Do not leave your teacher's supervision without permission.
- Do not enter the parking lot or ever leave the school without an adult.
- Do not roughhouse or play carelessly.
- Keep sticks and stones on the ground. Don't pick them up, and never throw them.
- Help your friends by letting your teachers know if they are hurt.

ENROLLMENT TERMINATION

When a student at GMMA finds it difficult to follow the school's expectations about personal conduct, we will quickly bring the student, family, and staff together to work toward a solution. We follow an approach based on empowerment, mutual respect, and trust. Neither corporal punishment, nor physical or emotional intimidation is allowed at GMMA.

If anyone consciously or flagrantly violates the social contract regarding safety, kindness, and courtesy, our response is to identify the appropriate and natural consequences of their actions. For example, if something is broken, it must be replaced or repaired. If the material needs to be repaired, we ask that the child help as a form of logical consequence. If the item is irreparable, the parent will be asked to purchase another for the school.

Any student who repeatedly breaks the ground rules, or who on even one occasion endangers the health and safety of others, may be asked to leave the school.

OTHER REASON FOR ENROLLMENT TERMINATION

The school operates on the tuition and fees paid for services. If a family's account is 60 days or more past due, the child will be withdrawn from the program until the account has been brought up to current status. Written notification of intent to withdraw a child shall be made at least seven days prior to withdrawal.

HARRASSMENT

All children must be free from harassment and bullying in our school. Children may not be cruel and/or abusive to each other in any way in our environment. If you believe an incident of harassment has occurred with your child, please report it immediately to your child's teacher. The school will investigate and take appropriate action. Harassment will not be tolerated from parents, as well as any staff member from GMMA. Please report any incident of harassment to the administrators as soon as possible.

WEAPONS

No weapons of any sort: Play or pretend guns, knives, swords and similar items – are NOT allowed on the premises. We do NOT condone games that consist of killing or inflicting harm on others. Please talk with your child about this subject if you witness them playing these sorts of games at home.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

We hold random fire drills regularly to acquaint children with evacuation procedures. These drills and practices are done so children will know what to do in case of an actual emergency.

- When the bell rings, our class will dismiss into designated areas and remain in their groups.
- The teachers will make certain the room is empty and close the doors.
- The teachers will join the class outside the building, take roll, and notify the office of attendance.
- Students are expected to remain grouped in the designated area until informed that they may return to class.

Great Minds Montessori Academy is equipped with a fire alarm system that includes horns and strobes. Fire extinguishers are located throughout the building.

ABSENCES

Please call us in the morning of your child's absence. Please leave a message if we are unable to answer. We check the phone periodically for messages. If you plan a family vacation and will not attend school, we will need at least a two weeks' advance notice.