

Parent Handbook

2011-2012

Preface

The Parent Handbook is designed as a reference tool for you to access information about our school's policies and procedures. If you have any questions or concerns about the information included in this handbook, please feel free to contact us any time.

Warmest Regards,
Riverstone Montessori Academy

Riverstone Montessori Academy An Educational Community

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Fostering Values and Attitudes

Riverstone Montessori Academy is a community of learners—parents; children, and staff—actively engaged in what Dr. Maria Montessori called “an education to life.” Although we represent a rich diversity of backgrounds and opinions, we share a commitment to the values underlying our special approach to learning. In a climate of mutual respect and support we strive to develop and support these values and attitudes in ourselves and others:

Attitudes toward Work and Learning

- To be self-directed, to be able to initiate activities, set goals, organize time, and complete projects.
- To have the determination to try, to be capable of working to the limit of one's ability in everything one does.
- To be persistent, to struggle with difficult work for long periods of time with few visible rewards, to take disappointment in stride.
- To think logically and rationally, to evaluate information and seek out different opinions and facts before making a decision.
- To be creative, using imagination to generate fresh and new ideas in all areas.
- To love learning, to find knowledge interesting in itself, to pursue interests with enthusiasm and for fun.

Attitudes toward Self and Others

- To recognize one's self as being special and to acknowledge the unique and special character of every other person.
- To be self-evaluative, to have realistic knowledge of one's own strengths and weaknesses, not ignoring nor dwelling on them.
- To have a sense of humor that does not rely on the belittling or putting down of others.
- To develop a personal code of ethics and to remain true to these values under emotional or group pressure.
- To be able to work with others to accomplish a goal, to learn to contribute ideas, to listen to others, and to compromise.
- To be responsible, not only in the sense of being reliable, but also able to take into account the effect of an action before performing it, and then being answerable for it afterwards.
- To balance development in emotional, spiritual, intellectual and physical areas.

Attitudes toward Society

- To understand the inter-dependence of humans, animals, plants, and the natural systems of the Earth.
- To have knowledge of and respect for the different ways humans have met their physical and spiritual needs over the ages and in different contemporary cultures.
- To be able to communicate clearly and comfortably with individuals of all ages and backgrounds.
- To be courteous, caring and respectful toward others, to know how to behave appropriately.
- To be able to use a variety of effective non-violent techniques for resolving conflict.
- To accept responsibility for making a contribution to benefit future generations.

School Life

Attendance and Tardiness

Children are expected to arrive on time in order to protect the classroom work cycle. Frequent tardiness and irregular attendance disrupts the class and limits the children's opportunities for social and academic growth. Please see the section regarding Attendance and Tardiness in "*Grounds for Dismissal*" in the ADDRESSING CHALLENGES section of this handbook. We also ask that you schedule family vacations during our regular vacation times, helping us to preserve the classroom dynamics and work cycle.

Attendance is taken on a daily basis, and the record of attendance can have ramifications regarding future enrollment in high school or other schools. Traditional school standards are the following: 8 tardies are equivalent to one absence. Ten absences could result in a child not being promoted to the next grade level.

Arrival and Dismissal

Students should arrive in time to be in their classrooms, ready for work, by 8:30 a.m. when classes begin.

Students should be picked up promptly at their scheduled time by authorized individuals. A written note is required for individuals not previously authorized before your child will be released. This note should accompany the child when he/she arrives in the morning and contain your immediate contact information (so we may verify this request if necessary), the individual's full name as it appears on their ID, the date and your signature. When this person arrives, he/she will be required to show a photo ID.

Carpool Procedures

All-Day Program Drop Off – Walk your child in and sign your child in at the front desk

7:30 a.m. – 8:15 a.m.

Car-Pool Drop Off

8:15 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.

Half-Day Car-Pool Pick up – Sign your child out

12:00 p.m. - 12:15 p.m.

School-Day Car-Pool Pick up – Sign your child out

3:30 p.m. – 3:45 p.m. After 3:45 you must walk in and pick up your child.

All-Day Pick Up – Walk in to pick up your child & sign your child out

3:45 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

To drop off between 8:15-8:30, please have your children ready to quickly exit the vehicle, a staff member will help escort them from the vehicle and into the school. Children must exit on the building side of the car. For the safety of our children, please **DO NOT PASS** in the carpool lane. Please be patient.

After 8:30 a.m. you must walk your children into the building and sign them in.

Afternoon carpool runs from 12:30-12:45 and 3:30-3:45 each afternoon. Please pull up by the primary courtyard and remain in your vehicle. A teacher will escort your child to the car and provide you with a sign-out sheet.

After carpool pick up is over you must enter the building to pick up and sign out your child.

The carpool lane is reserved for picking up and dropping off children only. Staff members are discouraged from conversing/taking messages during this time with drivers. Please feel free to park to take a moment to complete a task or conversation so that we can keep our carpool line moving smoothly.

Unclaimed Children

Children who are not in the All-Day (before & aftercare) program and are still waiting after car pool will return to their classroom with a staff member who will try to reach a member of the family. There is an additional charge of \$30 for late pick-up OR early drop-off.

Communication

Open communication is an important aspect of life at Riverstone, and we believe in maintaining an atmosphere of support and understanding. We encourage parents to talk with teachers whenever they have a question or concern. A teacher's time during school hours is reserved for the children, so please plan to call or meet outside of class time even for a short discussion.

Teachers and staff members can be reached via telephone and email after class time or during lunch unless indicated otherwise. Teachers will return calls as quickly as possible and initiate contact with the family if an important issue arises. We do our best to answer incoming phone calls and email throughout the day. Should all phone lines be busy, the phone system will send you to voicemail. We will return your call as soon as possible. Email communication is checked randomly throughout the day and will be addressed as soon as possible.

Thursday Folders

Your children will be given their Thursday Folders to bring home only on weeks when there are permission slips, examples of class work, and notes from the teachers going home to the parents. Please take time to review this information; if it is in your Thursday Folder it is important and relevant to you and your family. Please return this folder on Friday morning when you drop off your child.

The Thursday Note, a weekly e-mail describing upcoming events, announcements and notices will be delivered to your e-mail inbox every Thursday. Please read this e-mail in its entirety as it is our main channel

of communication with you. As with the information in the Thursday Folder, the Thursday Note contains information that is important and relevant to you and your family.

School related forms or announcements originating with parents or committees must first be routed through and receive approval from RMA. If you are affiliated with a school activity and wish to put a flyer or form in the Thursday Folder or an item in the Thursday Note, the office must receive it for approval no later than noon on Tuesday prior to the Thursday Folder distribution day.

Website

The website is designed for prospective and current parents. You can visit us online at www.RiverstoneMontessori.com for general information about the school as well as updates.

Communication of School Closings

We follow Cobb County's School schedule for closings due to inclement weather or local disaster.

Directory

A directory of names, addresses and phone numbers for the children in your child's class may be requested from the Office. We ask that you respect the privacy of the parents listed in the directory and use these numbers only for school-related purposes, children's social events, and carpool arrangements. *Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of students and their parents may not be released for commercial purposes and must remain confidential to the school.*

School Pictures

Individual pictures are taken each fall and class pictures are taken each spring.

Uniforms

At RMA, our focus is on the inner person. Our uniform policy is an important part of this dynamic; it forces children to focus on who a person is on the inside and not be distracted by outward appearances or displays. RMA will strictly enforce its uniform policy throughout the year:

- Children who do not come to school in uniform will have their parents contacted to have them bring a uniform to school before they can join their class

OR

- If available, the school will provide a uniform and the family will be billed accordingly.

Information on purchasing uniforms is available from the front desk. We do ask that all families provide a 2nd set of clothing to keep on campus in the event their child's clothing becomes soiled or to change

into for special projects. This outfit does not have to have the RMA logo, but should be a solid shirt and pants combination in keeping with our school colors of blue, white and gold/khaki. Please mark all personal belongings and clothing with your child's name.

Girls' Uniforms:

Bottoms - navy blue or khaki twill trousers, capris, shorts, skirts or skorts and jumpers. Shorts, skirts or skorts and jumpers should be no shorter than 2" above the knee. Biker shorts, leggings or tights are to be worn under skirts or jumpers with no exception. No cargo pants or cargo shorts (loose fitting casual pants with big pockets along the leg), yoga pants or sweats. Jeans are only allowed on Green Friday. Please check the calendar for specific dates.

Tops - white, navy blue or yellow polo shirts with school logo or middle school logo. **Haiti relief t-shirts (both versions) are also allowed as regular uniform shirts.** Peter pan shirts (jumper shirts) should only be worn under jumpers. Polo shirts may be worn under jumpers as well.

Boys' Uniforms:

Bottoms - navy blue or khaki twill trousers or shorts. No cargo pants or cargo shorts (loose fitting casual pants with big pockets along the leg) or sweats. Jeans are only allowed on Green Friday. Please check the calendar for specific dates.

Tops - white, navy blue or yellow polo shirts with school logo or middle school logo. **Haiti relief t-shirts (both versions) are also allowed as regular uniform shirts.**

Girls' & Boys' PE Uniforms:

Bottoms - navy blue knit or mesh shorts, or sweat pants. Please visit www.schooluniformdepot.com, choose our school and look under Girls/Boys PE Attire for acceptable options. Shorts should be no shorter than 2" above the knee. Girls may wear leggings or tights under their PE shorts during the colder months, if they prefer not to wear sweat pants. No biker shorts, yoga pants or leotards.

Tops - The school has designated the gold T-shirt with the large or small Riverstone Montessori logo as our "official" PE shirt. This shirt should be worn without exception on days when PE is done offsite (parks, YMCA, etc.).

Shoes, Socks, Outerwear & Jewelry:

Comfortable closed toe sneakers/tennis shoes are to be worn to school without exception. *No sandals, or flip flops. Ballet flats or crocs are only appropriate as indoor shoes.* This is to ensure the safety of our students while they play outside during recess or on PE days. Socks, tights and leggings with fun patterns may be worn with the complete, appropriate uniform. However, characters or media driven images/ messages, noisy or bulky embellishments or holiday motifs are not allowed. Jackets, sweaters or cardigans worn on the playground and for arrival and departure from school during the cold season are not required to bear the school logo. However, any outerwear worn in class during the school day must be part of the school uniform and bear the school logo (ie; RMA sweatshirts, RMA sweaters or RMA jackets only). Any jewelry worn to school must be subdued and unobtrusive. No large hoop earrings, big bracelets or long necklaces will be allowed. These items could break, get lost or cause injuries to children while playing on the playground or during PE. They can also be the source of distraction during the work periods in class.

Electronic Devices

Electronic devices (cell phones, iPods, handheld gaming devices, etc.) are not allowed at RMA without exception. The Middle School students are required to have laptops and calculators for use in class for school work only.

At Riverstone Montessori Academy, we strive to provide a safe and peaceful learning environment for our students. When students are allowed to have these unauthorized devices at school it is difficult for the faculty and staff to be available to monitor and guide the children regarding any unsuitable content they might encounter. It also allows them to become distracted with social networking or texting which might take focus away from their school work. If your child needs a phone for an after school event with a family member or friend, etc., we will require the phone to be checked in at the office. The phone will remain at the office and can be retrieved at the end of the school day. Any unauthorized electronics will be confiscated and returned to the parents at the end of the school day.

Confidentiality Policy

Information pertaining to a child's academics or behavior while enrolled in the school is considered confidential and may not be released by school staff without first obtaining written permission signed by the parents. Relevant information in this regard may be shared among the appropriate school faculty and staff. In emergency situations, information about a child's medical status, allergies, family situations, authorized adults to pick up a child, medical release forms, and any relevant information may be shared by school staff as needed with persons authorized by Bright from the Start or with other appropriate persons. All other information in student files is accessible as governed by local, state and federal ordinances.

Classroom Life

Readiness

Children in the Primary Classrooms are expected to be independent in the bathroom (including cleaning themselves).

Readiness for moving into Elementary and Middle School is determined in collaboration with the family and teachers at the current and upcoming level of enrollment. Montessori focuses on the development of the whole child; therefore, moving up based solely on age or academic ability is inappropriate in our environment. We look for academic, social and emotional readiness, to insure that each child has the opportunity to experience the greatest benefits of our programs.

Treasures and Toys

Montessori materials are not toys, even though children find their work with them to be great fun and of particular beauty. It is not uncommon to find tiny beads, puzzle pieces or cubes in their pockets from time to time. Please be sure to return these items, even if you are not sure what they are. The Montessori materials require each piece for effective use, and because of the precise craftsmanship involved in making these special materials, the equipment is extremely expensive. In many cases, the piece cannot be replaced except by ordering a whole new set.

If you should find such “treasure” in your children’s pockets, please help them return it with minimal fuss. A simple explanation that it belongs at school and needs to be returned so that all the children (including him or her) can enjoy it should suffice.

If it is determined by staff that a student intentionally damaged school property, including classroom materials, the child’s family will be billed for repair or replacement costs.

Please do not allow your child to bring toys to school. This includes all electronic games and devices. These items will be confiscated and sent home at the end of the day.

Observations

Parents and/or Guardians are required to observe in the child’s classroom at least once a semester. Observing provides an opportunity to better understand your child’s daily experiences in the Montessori environment. Beginning in mid-September and continuing through early May, families may call or visit the office to arrange a time to observe. Teachers receive weekly observation schedules and will be expecting you at your scheduled time.

Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parents and/or Guardians are required to attend all Parent/Teacher Conferences. At conference times, you will receive a report detailing your child’s progress. Older children frequently present detailed work portfolios.

Grades and Testing

Riverstone Montessori Academy does not place children in the artificial designation of grades (1st grade, etc.) nor assign grades (A, B, C, D, F) as a measure of achievement. Montessori classrooms allow children to work and learn at their own pace - which commonly is considered above “grade level” in a traditional setting. Stratifying children by age or grade would merely lower expectations and slow the child’s progress. The assignment of grades is well documented to be a disincentive for learning and achievement, *regardless* of the types of grades earned. Children thrive when they work for mastery and hold themselves to standards that are real and challenging, not arbitrarily imposed.

Field Trips and “Going Out”

All RMA children are involved in in-house field trips and staff supervised outings. These events may be small groups or class wide and, while enjoyable, are strictly educational. Most outings require extensive preparation and research on the part of the student and are an earned privilege. At the elementary and middle school levels, these outings take on particular importance as part of their educational and social development. Occasionally, students may not be allowed to participate if they do not complete work related to the event or are not demonstrating responsible behavior.

Classroom Responsibilities

Our children take responsibility for their experiences at school, including care of the environment. While we employ a cleaning crew in the evenings and wash all dishes in the dishwasher, you will hear your children speak of classroom responsibilities including cleaning up after work times, washing their own dishes, planting in the garden, etc. They are active participants in all aspects of their community and feel a great sense of ownership and care for their school environment.

Lunches

Eating food that is enjoyable as well as good for you is a nutritional habit that we wish to help develop in our children. We provide our students with a tasty, hot, well-balanced lunch that is made with fresh fruits and vegetables!

This is no ordinary school lunch; each meal is prepared by local chefs and delivered hot to our school daily. Meals are designed for nutritional content and mindful of most allergens. Each meal is served with low-fat milk and a vegetarian option is available.

We insist that any snacks or foods provided throughout the school year be healthy and nutritious in order to maintain this high standard. (i.e. low-fat yogurt, fresh fruits, cheese, whole grain breads, etc...no chocolate, candy, chips, artificial fruit snacks, etc...) Please help us maintain this standard by complying with good nutritional choices in all food brought by your child to RMA. Foods that do not meet this guideline will be returned home at the end of the day.

Celebrations

In order to maintain the integrity of our classrooms and insure that the maximum amount of class time possible is dedicated to educational activities, we do not celebrate commercial or religious holidays. We are a diverse population and these personal events are best enjoyed at home. This does not mean that cultural and historical studies are unwelcome. We wish to learn about other cultures and traditions as part of our curriculum; however, it is important to protect our classroom time for learning and to offer an environment in which children of differing backgrounds can feel safe, comfortable and welcome. Birthdays are acknowledged by the children being invited to share a picture timeline of their life with their classmates. At the Primary level, children are also welcome to walk around the "sun" (a lit candle) representing each year of their life.

Playground & Property Guidelines

In general, the guidelines of the Montessori classroom extend to the playground and the outdoors, namely, respecting ourselves, other persons, and the environment. Outside of the building and on the RMA playground children must be supervised at all times. Parents who have taken possession of their children are responsible for supervising them while on the RMA campus. Please remember these guidelines and actively supervise your children while outside as well as inside the building.

Lost and Found

Lost and Found items are kept in individual classrooms. Unclaimed items are donated to charity, or disposed of, at the end of each month.

Bumps and Bruises

If your child is injured or has an incident worthy of note while at school, you will receive an incident report and, possibly, a telephone call to keep you informed.

How to Communicate Changes at Home

Please let your child's teacher know of any significant changes to your child's life such as marriage, divorce, family hospitalization, traveling, moving, death in the family, or the anticipated birth or adoption of another sibling. These events may cause a child to act differently in class and teachers will be better able to respond to a child's behavioral changes if this information is provided. This information will remain confidential.

Parent Life

Riverstone Montessori Academy's Parent-School Partnership

Supporting Your Montessori Child:

It can be difficult for new families to understand everything about Montessori in their child's first year at Riverstone Montessori Academy. We do, however, expect parents to learn about Dr. Montessori's vision of childhood. Dr. Montessori's advice that we "follow the child" and trust the child is meant as specific, practical advice, not as an idealistic goal. Through her own scientific observations and the observations of Montessori teachers who followed her, children's stages of development and developmental needs were discovered. These discoveries have been repeatedly borne out by recent studies of brain development. When we say that we must learn to trust children to do what they need to do in order to create who they want to be, we are speaking literally. Achieving that level of trust and learning from observation occurs over time and with

study, to which all educators at RMA are committed. Parents must be willing to do their part to enter into the parent-school partnership by helping to unify their child's experience at school and at home. This is not to say that the home and school environments should be the same. They shouldn't, but they certainly need to be grounded in the same philosophical beliefs. When this is in place, parents and teachers, through observation, support the child's independence. Here are some ways parents can work with the school to support their children:

- Encourage solid work habits by bringing children to school on time.
- Pick children up on time.
- Encourage independence at home.
- Take family vacations when RMA has a break instead of during the times when school is in session.
- Provide a healthy diet and plenty of opportunities for exercise.

These suggestions for at-home responsibilities may be helpful:

Three to Four-ish

- Packs own lunch (with help in selection and preparation, when needed)
- Dresses self in morning
- Helps to choose own clothing for the day according to the weather
- Shakes out rugs
- Waters plants and flowers
- Sets table
- Washes windows and mirrors
- Brushes hair

Five and Six-ish

- Packs own lunch
- Dresses self in morning
- Chooses own clothing for the day according to the weather
- Shakes out rugs
- Waters plants and flowers
- Peels vegetables
- Prepares simple foods (sandwiches, boiled eggs, toast)
- Prepares own school lunch
- Helps hang and fold laundry
- Gathers wood for fireplace
- Rakes leaves
- Pulls weeds
- Takes pet for a walk
- Ties own shoes
- Responsible for minor injuries
- Cleans out inside of car
- Straightens or cleans out silverware drawer

Seven-ish

- Cares properly for bike and other outside toy equipment. Oils and cares for bikes and locks it up when unused
- Takes telephone messages in a polite manner and writes them down
- Runs errands for parents
- Sweeps and washes patio or deck area.
- Waters the lawn
- Washes the dog
- Trains pets
- Carries in grocery sacks
- Gets self up in the morning and to bed at night without assistance
- Is learning to be polite and courteous, to share and to respect others
- Assumes responsibilities such as carrying own lunch money and notes back to school
- Leaves bathroom in order, hangs up clean towels
- Mops floors
- Does simple ironing of flat pieces of fabric/clothing

Eight and Nine-ish

- Folds napkins properly and sets table properly
- Mops or buffs the floor
- Cleans Venetian blinds
- Helps rearrange furniture. Helps plan the layout
- Runs own bathwater
- Helps others with their work when asked
- Straightens own closet and drawers
- Shops for and selects own clothing and shoes with an adult
- Changes school clothes without being told
- Folds blankets
- Sews buttons or rips in seams
- Cleans up animal "messes" in the yard and house
- Begins to read recipes and cook for the family
- Cuts flowers and makes a centerpiece
- Paints fence or shelves
- Writes simple letters
- Writes thank you notes
- Helps with cleaning of the refrigerator
- Feeds the baby
- Helps bathe younger siblings
- Polishes silverware, copper or brass items
- Cleans patio furniture
- Dusts, polishes furniture

Nine and Ten-ish

- Changes sheets on the bed and puts dirty sheets in hamper
- Operates washer and dryer

- Measures detergent and bleach
- Buys groceries using a list and comparative shopping
- Prepares dishes from simple recipes
- Prepares a family meal
- Receives and answers own mail
- Makes fruit juice, lemonade, etc. from concentrates and powders
- Waits on guests
- Plans own birthday or other parties
- Simple first aid use
- Sews, knits or weaves, uses sewing machine
- Does chores without a reminder
- Learns banking and to be thrifty and trustworthy
- Washes family car

Eleven-ish

- Earns own money (chores, baby-sitting...)
- Handles sums of money honestly
- Able to navigate a city bus or Marta route
- Proper conduct when staying overnight with a friend
- Packs own suitcase
- Responsible for personal hobby
- Able to handle self properly when in public places or alone with peers

Twelve-Fourteen-ish

- Joins outside organizations, does assignments and attends meetings. Able to take responsibilities as a leader
- Puts sibling to bed and dresses them
- Cleans pool and pool area
- Respects others' property
- Runs own errands
- Mows the lawn
- Helps parent build things
- Cleans oven and stove
- Able to schedule ample time for studies
- Buys own treats
- Checks and adds oil to the car
- Can be home alone for short periods of time

Also, take advantage of the myriad ways to be involved in your child's Montessori experience:

1. **Attend Family Information Nights.** These meetings are open to family and friends and focus on the Montessori Curriculum and child development. We discuss the importance of supporting a child's natural need to be increasingly independent at every point in their lives.
2. **Read Dr. Montessori's books and books about the Montessori method.** You may borrow or purchase them in the front office. We also offer book discussions facilitated by staff members.

3. **Commit to the Montessori continuum through Middle School.** This is a rich environment that supports the long-term development of the child. Our expectation is that families will commit to keeping their children at Riverstone through middle school so that they can reap the full benefit of the Riverstone Montessori environment.
4. **Communicate with your child's teacher.** Talk with her as soon as you have a question or concern. She is the person that is most intimately knowledgeable about your child's progress and school experience. Through her, additional conferences can be arranged. At Riverstone, we model direct communication and effective problem-solving. Please share our commitment to work together to broaden our common ground and find creative solutions.
5. **Focus on the process instead of the product.** Your child is engaged in a long-term process, characterized most typically by bursts or explosions of progress rather than steady, predictable and sequential steps. Our focus is on the developmental process, not on the product. In other words, there may be periods when the exterior manifestation of the child's progress is minimal and not much is being produced on paper. This lack of physical evidence can cause anxiety in adults. Often, much is happening that we can not see on the surface, but when we remember to trust the child, as well as the training and expertise of the teachers, these fears can often diminish. The success of this approach is evident in many ways; the majority of our students test well above grade level and are happy, confident and enjoy learning.
6. **Observe your children.** We want the best for our children and think we know what is best for them. Observing our children, getting to know who they are, not what we think they are or want them to be, is the first step in understanding them and their true needs. Scheduled observations begin in mid-September. Call the office to schedule an observation. On the day of your scheduled visit, you will receive a clipboard with information about observing without disrupting the children's concentration. Please see the CLASSROOM OBSERVATIONS section of this handbook to see copies of the guidelines and forms.
7. **Listen to, but don't interview, your children.** Children communicate better when they feel part of a dialogue, instead of an interrogation. Tell them what was best about your day; ask what was best about theirs. Find ways to share instead of asking them to account for themselves. The flow of their day at school is just that – a process, not a product – and it may be difficult for them to remember or name precisely what they did. Children are most likely to remember significant human interactions (“She's not my friend anymore”) rather than details of a lesson. They also remember social occasions – snack, lunch, and recess – with more clarity than tasks they were engaged in alone.
8. **Donate money to the school.** Riverstone Montessori Academy relies on fundraising for special budget goals not covered by tuition. These funds provide for faculty and staff development, tuition assistance, and basic operating expenses.
9. **Volunteer your time and talent.** Broad participation of parents in the various activities of the school helps build an inter-generational community that values and supports all children. Obviously, every family can not participate in every activity, but a commitment by Riverstone families to be involved in some way enriches their experience and benefits the school. There is a certain strength that comes from a community constructed from the idea that our first and last priority is the children. Educator Roland Barth said, “The relationship among the adults who operate the school affects the character and quality of a school and the accomplishments of its students more than any other factor.” Your generosity of spirit is greatly appreciated.

Volunteer Opportunities:

- Sign up to bring *healthy* snacks
- Do a little gardening after you drop off your child for class
- Head up a Fund Raiser or volunteer to help
- Coordinate a Special Event or volunteer to help out
- Share a Skill or Talent with our students
- Provide transportation on Field Trips or “Going-Outs”

Working Agreements

Joined by common beliefs, purposes, and values, Riverstone Montessori Academy and its parents form a powerful team with far-reaching positive effects on children and the entire school community. Working in partnership, parents and school professionals model relationships based upon respect, civility and honesty. Good faith practices that focus on our common ground and good intentions are the essential underpinnings of effective working relationships.

The relationships between parents, faculty, and administration are formally governed by the school's written enrollment contract and *Parent Handbook* in which the school's policies, procedures, and expectations are clearly defined. Parents with concerns about the school or about its decisions are encouraged to inquire about and follow the school's *Support and Resolution Procedures*. Parents can best support a climate of trust and respect by communicating concerns openly and constructively to the teacher or administrator closest to the problem. While parents may not agree with every decision made by the school, in most cases the parents and the school will find enough common ground to continue a mutually respectfully relationship.

Riverstone Montessori Academy follows these guidelines published by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) in their *Principles of Good Practice* to help parents and independent schools sustain effective partnerships:

Guidelines from the National Association of Independent Schools

Parents Working with Schools/Schools Working with Parents

Parents and independent schools work together to create and sustain effective partnerships. The following *Principles of Good Practice* describes the respective roles and responsibilities of both partners:

Parents Working with Schools

1. Parents recognize that effective partnerships are characterized by clearly defined responsibilities, a shared commitment to collaboration, open lines of communications, mutual respect, and a common vision of the goals to be reached.
2. In selecting an independent school. Parents seek an optimal match for the needs of the student, their own expectations, and the philosophy and programs of the school.
3. Parents are familiar with and support the school's policies and procedures.

4. Parents provide a home environment that supports the development of positive learning attitudes and habits.
5. Parents involve themselves in the life of the school.
6. Parents seek and value the schools' perspective on the student.
7. When concerns arise, parents seek information directly from the school, consulting with those best able to address the concerns.
8. Parents share with the school any religious, cultural, medical, or personal information that the school may need to serve the student best.

Schools Working with Parents

1. The school recognizes that effective partnerships are characterized by clearly defined responsibilities, a shared commitment to collaboration, open lines of communication, mutual respect, and a common vision of the goals to be reached.
2. The school clearly and fully presents its philosophy, programs, and practices to parents during the admission process and encourages dialogue that clarifies parental expectations and aspirations for the student.
3. The school seeks and values the parents' perspective on the student.
4. Teachers and administrators are accessible to parents and model candid and open dialogue.
5. The school keeps parents well-informed through systematic reports, conferences, publications, and informal conversations.
6. The school offers and supports a variety of parent education opportunities.
7. The school suggests effective ways for parents to support the educational process.
8. The school actively seeks the knowledge it needs to work effectively with a diverse parent body.

Fundraising Programs

Each year, families are asked to invest in the continued success of our school and to share the excitement as we continue to expand the educational gifts we give to our children. Annual Fundraising revenues are one way we make this happen. They enhance the general operation budget of the school and also help assure minimum tuition increases. These projects help fund Scholarships, Professional Development, our Fine Arts programs and more.

The ability to maintain this exceptional environment where parents can make a difference relies on 100% participation from the families and staff. We encourage you to participate in an area that will be meaningful for you while allowing you the opportunity to help create a lasting difference in the community that we are building. Please give as you can.

Reading List for Parents

The following are suggested reading materials for parents. Many of these publications are available for checkout in the office. This is an introductory reading list. A more in-depth reading list can be obtained from the office.

1. Futrell, Kathleen (1995). *The Normalized Child*. North American Montessori Teachers' Association
2. Kahn, David (1995) *What is Montessori Elementary?* North American Montessori Association.

3. Kahn, David (1995). *What is Montessori Preschool?* North American Montessori Teachers' Association.
4. Lillard, Angeline S. (2005). *Montessori: the Science Behind the Genius*. New York: Oxford University Press.
5. Lillard, Paula P. (1996). *Montessori Today*. New York: Random House.
6. Montessori, Maria. (1949). *The Absorbent Mind*. Madras, India: Theosophical Publication House.
7. Oriti, Patricia. (1994). *At Home with Montessori*. North American Montessori Teachers' Association.
8. Seldin, Tim (2006). *How to Raise an Amazing Child the Montessori Way*. New York: DK Publishing.

Administrative Information

School Management and Governance

Riverstone Montessori has two Heads of School: The School Administrator and the Director of Education. They work together to supervise and manage the daily operations of the school. In consultation with teachers and AMI advisors, their primary responsibility is to maintain the integrity of the school's Montessori educational vision and to insure that the school remains viable to serve future generations. Requiring fiscal integrity, in the present and future, is integral to the responsibility of preserving the vision.

AMI/USA consultants evaluate the school, classrooms and staff every three years for AMI accreditation. AMI-trained consultants observe, evaluate, and support classrooms on a regular basis. New teachers receive support and mentoring by coordinators and colleagues. Only AMI-trained professionals are fully qualified to evaluate Riverstone's programs and faculty. Our expertise and commitment to the Montessori philosophy is one of the defining qualities of Riverstone Montessori Academy and is what attracts and retains parents who are strong supporters of our community.

Classroom Integrity

The standards of excellence for Riverstone Montessori Academy are set by AMI (Association Montessori Internationale). AMI was founded in 1929, by Dr. Maria Montessori to further her life's work in its original integrity and completeness and to guide its development and application in the interests of all children. AMI consultants visit AMI-recognized Montessori schools every three years as part of the accreditation process. Adherence to distinct philosophical and operational characteristics is necessary for a school to meet the AMI recognition criteria.

In our classrooms we are committed to supporting each child to develop his or her fullest potential. One way we do this is to help children develop focus and concentration by respecting their work and work cycle. The Montessori environment fosters independence and self-esteem by providing opportunities to practice the life skills inherent in managing social interactions and participating in conflict resolution

techniques. We meet the standard established by the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), which include:

- Appropriately trained teachers, adhering to the AMI guidelines established in training
- AMI consultations at a minimum of once every three years
- A complete set of AMI approved materials in each classroom
- Mixed age classes (3-6, 6-12 or 6-9, 9-12)
- Classes balanced by age and gender
- Classes run five days a week with substantial, uninterrupted work periods each day:

Primary

3 hours in the morning
1 ½ - 2 hours in the afternoon

Elementary & Middle School

3 hours in the morning
2 – 2 ½ hours in the afternoon

The AMI Team (AMI teachers, the Director of Education, the School Administrator) makes all the decisions regarding pedagogy, programs, and classrooms. Fundraising efforts, parent education, school activities, and long range plans are reviewed by the AMI Team to be sure they are keeping with the Montessori philosophy.

A clear vision and shared values comprise the bedrock that supports Riverstone Montessori Academy's decision-making process. Three characteristics of that process ensure Riverstone Montessori Academy's continued success:

1. The proven ability to keep the child, the Montessori philosophy, and Riverstone's mission at the center of every decision.
2. The retention of gifted professionals and parents with shared values who are committed to the Montessori philosophy and who work together to make decisions that reflect the community's values and commitment to AMI principles.
3. A commitment to excellence and on-going school improvement.

Organizational Structure

Who Does What in a Montessori Environment?

Off-Site School Administrator - Responsible for the Operation of the school along with the On-Site Administrator. Communicates on a daily basis with the On-Site Administrator and/or School Coordinator to discuss details of school operations and meets regularly with our marketing team, AMI Administrators Group and AMI/USA & AMI/International.

On-Site School Administrator - Takes care of the day to day operations of Riverstone. Works closely with the Off-Site Administrator and School Coordinator as she juggles a myriad of tasks in order to keep RMA running smoothly. The On-Site Administrator is your first stop for non-classroom related questions or

concerns. She also represents the school at off-site functions and the AMI Administrators Group and carries the full weight and confidence of the Off-Site Administrator in his absence.

Director of Education - Responsible for ensuring that all classes run according to AMI guidelines, observes in each classroom on a regular basis and offers practical advice for implementing the AMI experience for every child. If there is a concern that cannot be resolved after meeting with your child's teacher, The Director of Education will facilitate a meeting to resolve the issue at hand.

School Coordinator - Coordinates all school events and meetings; she is also our parent volunteer coordinator. Keeps faculty and staff all lined up with the Bright From the Start trainings and regulations to ensure the safety and security of RMA's children and families. Assists in putting together the weekly Thursday Note.

Marketing Coordinators - They work many hours behind the scenes to keep Riverstone in the public eye. From parades and festivals, to the advertising and printing of our marketing materials, they do it all in collaboration with The Off-Site administrator, On-Site Administrator and School Coordinator.

Lead Teachers - Teach and we protect this function as much as possible so that all of their energy is free to focus on the children. Teachers receive support from an administrative structure that frees them to offer the best AMI Montessori experience for our students.

Classroom Assistants - Help keep the classrooms running smoothly, they maintain the materials in the classroom, keep supplies stocked and help the lead teacher as directed to meet the needs of the classroom and the children.

Spanish Teachers - The Spanish Teachers present their lessons in small groups based on ability and readiness. The children are grouped and regrouped regularly so that they can move forward at their own pace.

Enrichment - Riverstone Montessori Academy offers a changing array of optional enrichment opportunities focused on academic, social and artistic development. In the Montessori tradition, these classes are multi-age and open to all prepared children. In addition to our all-day Montessori program, Riverstone enrichment classes are held after the afternoon academic work period, for the convenience of parents.

Addressing Challenges

Early Intervention

Current research clearly reinforces our view that early intervention in childhood challenges is critical. For example, the National Institute of Health's 20-year research on reading suggests that 60% of children will

face challenges in learning this skill. If proper support has not been given, by the time a child reaches 4th grade, the possibility of catching up is very low. The report recommends that problems in reading must be identified and addressed early to ensure the success of children in all content areas where reading is crucial. Because reading is such a critical skill in our culture, the high number of children who are not currently reading at an adequate level has actually resulted in a public health issue.

At RMA, we have seen the positive results of alert observation and immediate intervention. Sometimes adults take a “wait and see” approach, thinking that the difficulties are simply developmental and will not become real problems. Experience has taught us at Riverstone that it is better not to wait. Children who receive the support they need become successful learners, regardless of what issues they are struggling with. Children who are supported in this way also maintain a sense of confidence in themselves and are positive about learning. Sometimes discerning the kind of support needed is difficult. Parents and teachers must work in partnership and try many different approaches; some may work out and some may not. However, in our experience, every time parents were willing to persevere in finding the best support, children found success. On the other hand, children who are left to struggle without intervention and support feel very discouraged about school and themselves. When that happens, emotional problems add to the learning difficulties.

We want to ensure that every child has a successful school experience. Gaining necessary skills and building positive self esteem are vital to this successful experience. These two goals urge us to take a proactive stance in responding to a child who is having difficulty with his or her intellectual, social, or emotional development. We explain to parents what we observe in the classroom and join them in exploring intervention possibilities.

Occasionally, an evaluation from a trained professional is required to provide expert advice as to how to best meet a child’s needs. When this is necessary RMA will request access to this information as it relates to the child’s ability to successfully function in the classroom environment and their continued enrollment. All such information is kept confidential.

Discipline

Montessori classrooms are open environments that allow students to have freedom of movement. With this freedom and the responsibility for their own work, students are held to a high standard of behavior. In most instances, the natural consequences that result are enough to correct poor choices. Montessori students are familiar with appropriate means of interacting in caring and appropriate ways, handling materials carefully, dealing with frustration and resolving disputes with others in a peaceful manner.

In instances where children refuse to cooperate with staff in addressing their behavior or who express themselves in a salacious or threatening manner, either physically or verbally, the family will be contacted and required to immediately pick up the child from school.

Concern Resolution Procedures

Parent Concern about Child/Teacher

1. Meet with teacher (with or without Director of Education)
2. Meet with teacher and Director of Education
3. Meet with teacher, Director of Education and School Administrator
4. Director of Education and School Administrator make final decision

Teacher Concern about Child/Parent

1. Meet with parents (with or without Director of Education)
2. Meet with parents and Director of Education
3. Meet with Director of Education and School Administrator
4. Director of Education and School Administrator make final decision

Grounds for Dismissal from Riverstone Montessori Academy

To ensure the safety and integrity of our school community RMA administrators reserve the right to dismiss a student and/or their siblings for cause which includes but is not limited to the following:

1. Inability to function in the Montessori classroom. Occasionally, a child needs specialized help for physical, emotional or educational needs. Parents will be informed if the teacher feels a problem exists and cannot be resolved with our resources.
2. Habitual absences and/or tardiness (either arriving late or leaving early) that negatively impacts the child's ability to function in the classroom as determined by the lead teacher or by Georgia State Guidelines.
3. Failure by the parent to attend required parent/teacher conferences and/or informational meetings.
4. Lack of parental involvement and assistance in support of the classroom and the school.
5. Failure to pay tuition and/or other monies owed within 30 days of original date due.
6. Parent behaviors that are neither respectful of nor conducive to community, including irresolvable differences regarding school policies. Riverstone Montessori Academy believes that a positive and constructive working relationship between the school and a student's parents or guardian is essential to the fulfillment of our mission.
7. Riverstone Montessori Academy reserves the right not to continue enrollment or not to re-enroll a student if RMA reasonably concludes that the actions of a parent or guardian make a positive and constructive relationship impossible or otherwise seriously interfere with the school's accomplishment of its educational purposes.
8. Behavior by any student or family member of a student that threatens physical, emotional or financial harm to any member of the RMA staff, student body or RMA as an institution.
9. Possession of any illegal substances or weapons by students and/or their family members on the RMA campus or at RMA sponsored events.
10. A parent or guardian convicted of a crime or moral turpitude.

Health & Medical Information

Forms

We must have a signed statement giving consent for medical treatment for each enrolled child. If we should have to contact you in case of an emergency, we will rely on the Student Information Card for the most current, accurate information. Each classroom teacher has copies of the Student Information Cards with signatures; class medical files are taken on camping trips, field trips, and fire drills. *If your daytime number changes during the school year, please advise us immediately.* You may call or email changes to the office at any time.

Bright from the Start monitors our programs and requires us to have on file the *complete work address of each parent in these programs.* We must have this information for every child at Riverstone. Please fill this information in completely in the parent enrollment forms.

Dispensing of Medications

The parent must provide the following before any non-prescription or prescription medication is administered to a student:

1. A *Medication Authorization* form completely and accurately filled out and turned in to the Riverstone office.
2. Your child's medication in the *original container from the pharmacist.* (If requested, the pharmacist will give you two original containers.)
3. Your child's medication is handed *directly* to a Riverstone staff member by an adult. *Do not put medications in backpacks, etc.*
4. If your child is to receive medication for *longer than two weeks*, Riverstone must have a letter from your child's doctor stating that your child will be continuously medicated.

Contagious Diseases

Notices of communicable diseases and highly contagious maladies such as chicken pox, or lice are sent home with every affected child as soon as we are aware of the situation. Riverstone's lice policy requires the child to remain home until completely nit-free. We have a separate *Lice Primer*, available in the office, which will help you identify, treat, and control a lice infestation. If your child develops a fever, you must keep him or her home for at least 24 hours *after the fever subsides without medication.* If antibiotics are required, the child must stay home for at least 24 hours *after beginning treatment.* A child with any of these symptoms may infect other children. If all parents keep sick children at home, everybody's children and teachers will stay healthier.

Because of the possible need for extra preventive actions, or care for other members of the Riverstone community who may have been exposed, we ask that parents let the office know as soon as possible if the child has a communicable disease. This information will be shared only with the child's teacher. If notice of the illness needs to be communicated to other members of the Riverstone community (e.g., other parents), notification will be sent in generic terms (e.g., "A child at Riverstone has a diagnosis of ...") in order to protect the child's privacy.

When to Keep Your Child at Home

Because infections spread easily from one child to another, please keep your child home if he or she has any of the following symptoms:

Fever: Temperature of 100°F or higher, taken under the arm, *and* sore throat, rash, vomiting, diarrhea, earache, mucus that is not clear in color, irritability or confusion **or** a temperature of 101.5°F, taken under the arm, with or without other symptoms

Diarrhea: Three or more watery stools (BM, poop) in a 24-hour period

Vomiting: Two or more times within the past 24 hours

Rash: Body rash, especially with fever or itching

Sore throat: with fever and swollen glands

Eye discharge: Thick mucus or pus draining from the eye, or pinkeye

Not Feeling Good: Unusually tired, pale, lack of appetite, confused, or irritable

Head lice: A Head Lice Primer is available in the office.

Immunization Records

The State of Georgia requires schools to retain proof of immunization for every child (unless you prefer to file an exemption for medical or religious purposes). Please schedule an appointment with your physician far ahead of time and don't wait until the last month of summer. "Well babies" often have to wait months for the next available appointment. *Certificate of Immunization* (Form 3231) will be used for all children regardless of age.

If your child is new to Riverstone: By the first day of school, you will need to turn in Form 3231, stating that your child has received all of the age-appropriate immunizations. If you have a very young child, the date of expiration will also be written on the form. These vaccines are now required for a child at the time of school entry:

- Chicken pox
- Measles (2 doses), mumps, rubella
- Hepatitis B
- Hib, DTP, OPV

If your child is four years old and was at Riverstone last year: Four-year-olds must have their immunizations evaluated and must receive the MMR and/or the chicken pox vaccine. You will receive Form 3231 from your doctor.

If your child is 11-12 years old: A second dose of measles-containing vaccine (MMR) is required before a child enters grade 6. Your child may have already had this. Do check before the beginning of school so that, if your child does need the second dose you will have time to schedule an

appointment. **Rising sixth-years must be vaccinated for chicken pox OR have documentation of the disease before the beginning of school.**

Insurance and Liability

Under Georgia law, the owner of a vehicle is liable for anything that happens to anyone riding in that vehicle. In the event of a serious injury or death in an automobile on a field trip, the automobile owner is personally liable. Anyone who volunteers to provide transportation for a field trip should take note of this personal liability.

Emergency Evacuations

All staff and children are trained in safety procedures to be implemented in emergency situations. Tornado drills and fire drills are scheduled to ensure familiarity of procedures. Information and evacuation routes are posted within each classroom. If we have an emergency school closing mid-day, school personnel will contact you.