THE RED OAKS
SCHOOL

PARENT CURRICULUM GUIDE

2023-2024 Early Childhood Program
(Ages 3–6)

Early Childhood at The Red Oaks School

The three-year Early Childhood curriculum is predicated on the belief that three- to six-year-olds have an incredible capacity to learn and accomplish and are capable of astonishing things that go well beyond common expectations. Our multi-age classrooms allow each student to progress at his/her optimal pace. There is a decided emphasis on igniting the natural enjoyment of learning. Students leave the Early Childhood program skilled, relaxed, and confident in their abilities.

The course of study is based on Montessori principles, using ingeniously designed hands-on materials specific to the Montessori method that are self-correcting and sequentially presented to each student individually. Self-correcting materials can be “checked” and, therefore, completed independently by the student. For example, if there is an extra piece of a job left unused, the student can determine that a correction is needed and can continue to work with that material until mastery is achieved without waiting for teacher intervention. This builds confidence and allows each student to progress at his/her own pace. Classroom environments are designed to encourage independence. They are carefully planned, prepared, and maintained to ensure students have materials to challenge them as they progress through carefully sequenced activities and experiences.

Typically, children choose their work from the materials their teachers have prepared for them and have made available on the classroom shelves. Teachers may help guide student choice due to the observations and notes collected concerning each student’s progress and work habits. Core areas of the classroom include Practical Life, Sensorial, Math, Language, and Cultural Studies. In addition to developing solid academic skills, children learn about other cultures and the world around them. Music, Art, World Languages, and Physical Education are all important elements of the program.

Specific Areas of Study:

Practical Life

"Practical Life" describes activities in the Montessori classroom that enable young children to perform simple everyday tasks for themselves. The key purpose of the Practical Life area is to facilitate growth in independence, concentration, and coordination. Materials and activities empower children to care for themselves and their surroundings. Materials are aesthetically pleasing and are designed to promote the development and growth of fine and gross motor skills, control of movement, and hand-eye coordination. Many of these activities have additional subtle purposes as well. For example, materials are often arranged and used in a "left to right" and "top to bottom" pattern to indirectly prepare students for reading and writing, while small grains used in a transferring activity require students to exercise the same pincer grip later used to hold a pencil correctly.



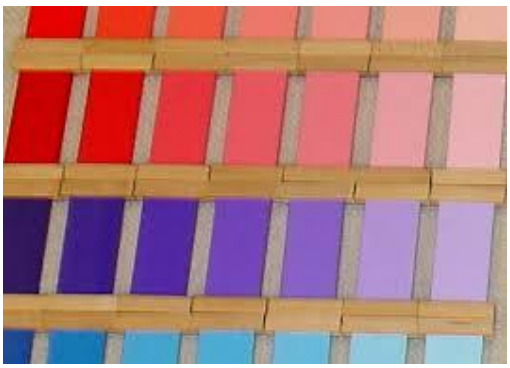

On any given day, students can be seen buttoning, snapping, zipping, and buckling specially designed frames as they practice the skills needed to dress. Others may be observed pouring water from various-sized vessels, transferring spoons of rice between bowls, tweezing and arranging small items, grasping objects with tongs, or washing tables with sudsy sponges as they learn how to handle real utensils used in everyday life.

“Grace and Courtesy” lessons are those activities that help students develop a sense of classroom citizenship. Teachers model positive and appropriate social skills formally and informally throughout the day. They can role-play how a child might resolve conflict, appropriately interrupt a conversation, or greet classmates upon arrival. The consistent use of respectful language such as “please” and “thank you” is an integral part of daily classroom life. In addition, teachers spend time giving lessons on walking carefully, carrying objects, and moving gracefully in the classroom.

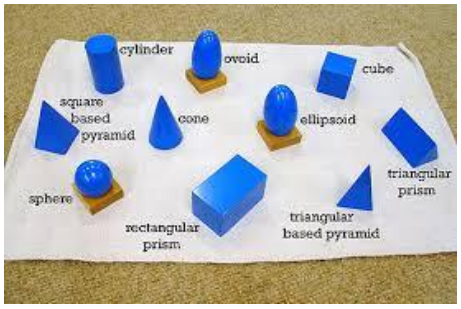
Sensorial

The Sensorial materials in a Montessori classroom are designed specifically to hone the senses, enabling children to discriminate subtle differences. This type of discrimination prepares students to approach, analyze, and problem-solve. It is the bedrock of mathematical thinking and logical reasoning.

Each activity isolates a specific sense and encourages practice and precision. Visual discrimination is sharpened as a student deliberately builds a prescribed pattern with wooden rods that vary only in length. Precision is required to match and organize barely distinguishable shades of color on tablets designed for this purpose alone. Auditory discrimination is challenged when students are required to match and order cylinders that emit various sounds and tones.



In addition to honing the student's use of his/her senses, the Sensorial materials provide countless opportunities for teachers to both model and present, in formal lessons, a rich vocabulary that students can later use to describe or explain relationships ("long, longer, longest," "heavy, heavier, heaviest"). Teachers play games, asking students to retrieve the "heaviest" or "lightest" cube. Students trace, observe, and use accurate nomenclature like "sphere" and "trapezoid" when working with polygons and 3D solids designed for the Sensorial area of the classroom.



The students are constantly exposed to concrete examples of the concepts they will later need to be able to understand in the abstract. The "longest side" of a triangle they trace may later become a "hypotenuse" on the page in front of them. The terms "similar" and "different" will be far from new as they remember searching through a stack of fabrics for two identical swatches. Honing the senses equips students to make sense of their immediate surroundings and gives them the tools for future learning and the language to express ideas precisely and accurately.

Language

The ROS Montessori Language curriculum addresses both expressive and receptive language skills. Rich spoken language is modeled and practiced, and students progress through carefully planned activities as they prepare to read and write fluently. Teachers read rich literature and maintain a "print-rich" environment to support Montessori's belief that many young children can read early and well.

The Montessori Language materials are sequential and presented to children individually when they have the necessary preceding skills. A student's journey to fluency begins with multi-sensory materials designed to reinforce the sound/symbol relationship. Students trace sandpaper alphabetic symbols and practice pronouncing the correlating sounds. Lowercase letters expose students to the most common symbols in reading experiences. Associating sounds to those symbols rather than letter names allows for a quick and natural pathway to writing and reading.

Students arrange the alphabetic symbols of a “moveable alphabet” to form words. This encoding or “writing” with specially designed letters allows students to compose words and sentences without having to master using a pencil before doing so. This language construction leads seamlessly to blending sounds needed for reading or “decoding.”

Simultaneously, students prepare to write, practicing their pencil grip and the strokes necessary for proper letter formation, employing left-right and top-to-bottom patterns. For example, they feel the sandpaper letters using their tactile sense and trace the geometric shapes of the metal inserts. They may trace letters in sand or water and practice placing symbols appropriately on lines to solidify correct placement.

While the students continue to practice letter formation and placement, they are introduced to the Red Oaks Writing program. It draws various ideas from *Write from the Beginning*, a developmental writing program that employs **Thinking Maps*. The activities encourage students to expand, organize, and illustrate their thoughts by drawing detailed pictures. After mastering letter formation, the student is introduced to the concept of a word and then a sentence. Inventive (phonetic) spelling is common and age-appropriate as the writing progresses.

**Thinking Maps* help students organize their thoughts, categorize, compare and contrast, sequence, and select pertinent facts from all of the information they have collected about a particular subject.

Throughout this process, teachers initiate oral language games to reinforce sound/symbol relationships and build the phonemic awareness needed to decipher and construct words. For instance, a teacher often gathers a small group of children and asks them to deconstruct the sounds of various items collected on a tray.

Once a student can read various phonetic word families, he/she is introduced to phonograms like “th” and “sh,” blends, and vowel combinations using similar multi-sensory materials. Concepts continue to be presented individually as each student is ready.

Students practice reading short and long vowel books and sight words. In addition, they work on reading comprehension and answering simple questions about the story.

The ROS student's journey through the acquisition of language is deliberate and individualized. The materials are constantly adjusted to meet the needs of each individual student.

Math

The Math materials in the Montessori classroom are carefully designed to represent concepts and encourage needed repetition and practice. The materials are presented to students individually as each student masters the prerequisites necessary for success. The materials are presented sequentially and each experience builds upon prior learning.

Each classroom has materials that reach far beyond common early childhood expectations. Each material serves a specific purpose and demonstrates a specific concept of skill. Maria Montessori believed that allowing students to touch, count, build, and solve concretely enabled them to understand mathematical concepts typically reserved for older students.

Students typically begin their journey perfecting one-to-one correspondence counting materials that encourage accuracy and perseverance. Because the materials are self-correcting, students can count and recount until their process is precise and accurate. Students "feel" ten before learning to recognize the symbol representing ten. This concrete experience enables students to estimate accurately and reason logically as they progress. As students count and group wooden spindles, the idea of a quantity being a "set" or a "collection of ones" facilitates deep and lasting understanding.

Soon after a student has a firm understanding of quantities and an accurate method of determining quantities, symbols are introduced. The materials used to introduce numerals are the same multi-sensory materials employed to introduce the alphabetic symbols. Students trace sandpaper numbers, and students can be heard and seen rehearsing and ordering them in various games and activities. They practice correct stroke formation in the same manner they practice their alphabetic symbols. Numbers are treated as a language, and teachers model mathematical verbiage and thinking throughout the day.

The deliberate joining of symbols and quantities after both have been mastered separately ensures a true understanding of concepts beyond rote verbalization. Students can be seen counting and matching quantities to symbols using various materials specifically prepared for this purpose. They “build” or compose quantities with materials emphasizing a number’s composition. For example, bars of ten beads joined together are used when building teens to show the unique relationship teens have with the number ten. The student literally “sees” twelve as “10 and 2.” In deference to Montessori’s commitment to engaging and challenging students, counting materials reach beyond 1-10, into the teens and beyond. Students can employ beaded materials that demonstrate place value into the thousands.

Operational functions are demonstrated with large and small quantities to emphasize that “addition is joining “and “subtraction is taking away or separating.” For example, you may see students counting single beads, bars of ten beads, squares of one hundred beads, and cubes made of 1,000 beads to determine a sum after joining two piles of “golden bead” material with a friend on a rug. Cards designed to construct numerals well into the thousands are used to show quantities.

Students prepare for multiplication when they count specially designed chains made of bars of beads. You will hear students counting by five, “five, ten, etc...” as they lay their hands on each bar of five beads. This concrete preparation for later application is a hallmark of Montessori math programs.

Cultural Studies

At the Primary level, we have a two-pronged approach to the cultural curriculum – Science and Geography. This area aims to connect the children to the world around them, encourage their natural curiosity, help them develop essential thinking and learning skills, and guide them on their way to becoming stewards of the environment and responsible global citizens.

Science

The science curriculum aims to arouse the children's imagination and curiosity and teach them to question the world around them. Students develop critical thinking skills such as recognizing the importance of the parts to the whole, sequencing, classifying, comparing, and contrasting. They apply these learned skills in various situations, which help develop an independent learner/thinker. Through experimentation, children learn to question, observe, predict, and problem-solve, introducing them to the scientific method. The students' grasp of concepts and their abilities are assessed through observation during activities and discussions following the activity.

The Science curriculum aims to capitalize on the children's sense of wonder and natural curiosity about nature and animals. This is done through the introduction to basic botany and zoology. First, the children are introduced to the "big picture" in a very concrete, multisensory manner. The concepts are presented through the various activities on the science shelves and reinforced in other classroom areas when appropriate. Gradually, teachers narrow it down and focus on the big picture. The activities are designed with the multi-age group in mind. The activities progressively build in complexity according to the children's growing abilities.

The following concepts are introduced through the Primary cycle: the four elements (land, air, water, fire); classification of living and non-living things; classification of living things into plants or animals; the life cycle of plants; the life cycle of animals; classification of animals into vertebrate or invertebrate; classification of vertebrates into their five groups (fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals).

According to the Next Generation Science Standards, students in grades K-5 should begin to develop an understanding of the four scientific disciplinary core ideas:

- Physical Sciences
- Life Sciences
- Earth and Space Sciences
- Engineering and Technology

In the early grades, students need to be able to *recognize patterns* and *formulate answers to questions* about the world around them.

Grade Level	Science Expectations
K	Students are expected to develop an understanding of patterns and variations in local weather and the purpose of weather forecasting to prepare for and respond to severe weather.
K	Students can apply an understanding of the effects of different strengths or different directions of pushes and pulls on the motion of an object to analyze a design solution.
K	Students are also expected to develop an understanding of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive and the relationship between their needs and where they live. - Concepts covered in geography with the continent coverage
K	The crosscutting concepts of patterns; cause and effect; systems and system models; interdependence of science, engineering, and technology; and the influence of engineering, technology, and science on society and the natural world are called out as organizing concepts for these disciplinary core ideas.
K	Students are expected to demonstrate grade-appropriate proficiency in asking questions, developing and using models, planning and carrying out investigations, analyzing and interpreting data, designing solutions, engaging in argument from evidence, and obtaining, evaluating, and communicating information.

Geography

The Geography curriculum aims to help children, at an early age, gain a sense of their place in the world. They learn that people worldwide have the same basic needs: food, shelter, language, clothing, transportation, and currency. How people fulfill these needs depends on where they live and what they have available. The curriculum starts with the “big picture.” Earth is made of land (continents) and water (oceans). In the fall, we start with North America, the continent on which we live. The children are introduced to its location, the names of some of the countries, and its animals. The children develop and employ many essential skills throughout the unit in various activities. The material is introduced to the children in a concrete, multisensory, and sequential manner. It is presented in various degrees of complexity, matching their abilities.

The rest of the continents are introduced over the course of the school year. The unit on each continent follows a similar sequence of topics and activities covered in the North America unit. The children are encouraged to make connections and determine differences and similarities. Again, the purpose is to impress the children that we all have the same basic needs even though we might go about fulfilling them in different ways.

The Geography curriculum lays the foundation for global citizens who respect and empathize with their fellow man, wherever he lives. Our community service projects are closely linked to the units we cover in the curriculum. Through these projects, the children become aware that in our society and other countries, not everyone can adequately fulfill their basic needs. Some projects are locally based, while others are tied to the continents we study. In either case, the children experience the joy of giving.

Spanish

The students are introduced to Spanish at the Primary level following the Symtalk Method. Using self-explanatory symbol cards, the students learn to speak before they start to read and write. From the start, they feel immediately empowered and can articulate useful and relevant sentences, for example: “Rosa eats a cake, Rosa plays with the dog,” etc.

The colorful symbol cards allow them to build:

- oral proficiency, learning to pronounce the words correctly
- vocabulary
- awareness of subject-verb-object sentence structure sequence.

Each class is divided into three parts:

- Greeting song/conversation: Students are greeted with a song. The students will then engage in basic conversation with the teacher on topics that include proper greeting, weather, name and age, among others.

- Symtalk method cards: The cards will be used to make and "read" sentences, building and expanding the vocabulary, learning and using correct sentence structure.

- Song/ movement (3/4 year olds): Students will learn songs in Spanish relating to a variety of themes.

Activity book: Kindergartners will work on the Symtalk *Español 2*, reinforcing the material learned with the Symtalk cards. They will start reading and writing, identifying the vocabulary from a word bank. The Kindergarteners learn colors, nouns, and adjective vocabulary.

This year, our cultural study will be about Mexico. We will focus on learning about this country through lessons, songs, books, traditional stories, and dance. Additionally, there will be a Spanish assembly in the spring highlighting what students have learned throughout the year.

Art

Art is another way students at ROS can explore differences and similarities in cultures, traditions, and philosophies. Our integrated approach extends from the classroom Cultural Studies. It allows children to relate to and create works that echo the people and places they are learning about in the cultural curriculum.

Through the fine arts program at Red Oaks, the students participate in a rigorous study of the arts, which is comprised of the following components:

- Art production Involves critical thinking, imaginative processes, and the expression of the heart, mind, and hand.

- Art history - Examining art and artists and their contributions to society. We ask questions like, "Why was art created?" "How was it used?" "What is the purpose?"

- Art criticism and aesthetics - Involves the students in responding to, interpreting, and applying critical thinking to their art and the work of others. We ask the questions, "What was the artist trying to say?" "How did you come to that conclusion?" "How can the art be changed?"

The Primary art curriculum begins to examine creative thinking and builds foundational skills and techniques in these early developmental stages. The art curriculum encourages students through experimental and guided learning opportunities and an exploratory use of materials. Beginning with the basic elements of art, students learn the importance of line, color, and shape and conduct a series of multimedia projects that draw inspiration from the world around them.

Methods include drawing, painting, collage, and mixed media, and students work toward artistic literacy.

Music

Music at ROS is both expressive and explorative. Students consider music from a wide variety of sources to understand and foster respect for cultures extending far beyond their experiences. Simultaneously, students learn fundamental skills to develop confidence and creative spirits. Students' early musical experiences help to set the stage for the perseverance needed for later study and practice.

Three principles guide the Music Program at The Red Oaks School:

- Children respond intuitively to rhythm and melody.
- Musical sounds are created by musical actions upon an instrument.
- Musical concepts are discussed only after they have been experienced.

The Primary Music program consists of a carefully prepared series of experiences, including singing, listening, moving, and playing instruments. Through these activities, children explore many elements of music, such as rhythm, melody, harmony, timbre, and form. Primary Music classes address the application of skills that are still being developed. Musically, students learn to match pitch, follow beat, and respond to musical cues. Additionally, they increase their attention spans, improve their motor skills, and practice appropriate socialization. Throughout the year, lessons and activities will foster artistic literacy through the processes of creating, performing, responding, and connecting.

Physical Education

The Red Oaks Physical Education curriculum is designed to help develop students' physical literacy. The International Physical Literacy Association (2017) describes physical literacy as, "the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life."

Given that physical literacy is a lifelong process, we aim to develop a strong base of fundamental movement skills with our Early Childhood students. Fundamental movement skills are basic movement skills taught through various individual and group games and activities that engage children and motivate them to continue participating in physical activity. These basic movement skills include:

- Locomotor (walk, run, dodge, jump, hop, skip)
- Non-locomotor (land, rotate, balance)
- Manipulative (throw, catch, kick, strike with an implement)

These basic skills are not only fun but also teach the essential skills required as a foundation for more complex physical activities and sports. It is of utmost importance that all children develop a good base of these skills before puberty to optimize future performance and lifelong physical activity (City of Richmond, 2015).

Our units of instruction for this school year are as follows:

- Locomotor movement skills
- Throwing and catching
- Movement Composition (Gymnastics & Dance)
- Striking and Dribbling

Embedded within these units of instruction are opportunities for Early Childhood students to continue developing their teamwork, cooperation, communication, and problem-solving skills through various games and activities.