

Marin Montessori School's Elementary Community

Parent Handbook

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CURRICULUM

Cosmic Education: The Foundation of the Elementary Curriculum

What makes Montessori education unique is that we deeply understand the natural and innate characteristics of humans during the different stages of their development. With this understanding, we create learning environments that attend to and harness those inherent characteristics.

We know elementary children. We know how to offer lessons that are best suited to their needs – social, emotional, physical, and academic. And, we know how to prepare children for the next stage in their academic lives. But more importantly, we prepare them for the lives they will lead beyond our four walls and into what is to come beyond their educational careers.

Our elementary classrooms are prepared for children in the second stage – or plane -- of development. In the second plane, children:

- Are social beings. They are interested in learning how to become members of society and how to work well together. This means that they are naturally inclined to engage with one another, and our classrooms are set up to capitalize on this.
- Are interested in becoming responsible for themselves and for the impact they'll have in the world.
- Have immense intellectual capacity.
- Want to understand how things work on their own and in relation to one another.
- Are keen to use imagination as a tool for studying those things beyond the grasp of the empirical.
- Want to achieve abstraction.
- Want to do big work. This is work that involves multiple subject areas and collaboration. It is where the children's intellectual pursuits and social exploration intersect.

To attend to these characteristics, the curriculum for the Elementary classes was called Cosmic Education because it is meant to include everything in the Universe.

A foundational part of this curriculum is the collection of lessons that introduces students to subject matter that will pique their interest, help them to understand the universe and their impact, and support their learning of benchmark skills. Beyond the specific information presented in lessons, the Elementary curriculum also aims to bring the children's awareness

to the interconnectedness of the universe so that they will eventually be able to discover the ways that they can successfully and meaningfully contribute.

Curriculum Overview

Below, you will find the link to the Elementary Curriculum Overview. This document provides detailed information about the lessons Elementary children will have during their tenure in the Elementary program. Please remember that while we are committed to supporting the mastery of benchmark skills, our greatest purpose is to inspire our students to make discoveries, learn how *they* best learn, work with concentration and joy, and find their passions. To accomplish this, we offer many lessons covering topics that appear in no standard curriculum. Thus, we do not require that every child master every subject introduced. Rather, we want them to be inspired to explore. Click [here](#) to get a glimpse of the topics that might inspire your child in the coming years.

Independence and Accountability

If we let the children choose what they are going to work on, how do we ensure that they learn what they need to learn?

Your child's Guide does careful planning, lessons, and record-keeping to guide the children toward essential work and areas of interest. Additionally, we have three tools that help us to ensure that our students are meeting the state benchmarks while also offering them the freedom to choose their work:

- Record Books
- Individual Meetings
- California Common Core State Standards

Each child in the Elementary keeps a record of their daily work in a personal journal. We call these **record books**. The children record the work they do and the lessons they receive. The Guide checks the record books daily. During record book checks, teachers role model executive functioning by reminding students of work that needs to be finished or checking in on progress with work on which students have spent a lot of time. The development of these skills is critical to success in later life.

Guides also have individual meetings with each student at least once per month. During these meetings, the child brings all of their current work, both finished and unfinished. The meetings are often spent reviewing and organizing work so that the child has a clear idea about what tasks need to be completed and determining a plan for doing so. These meetings are also the time when Guides can check in with students about how well they are retaining and mastering the information they have learned. If a child does not remember any of the

information, despite ample follow-up work, the Guide and student will discuss different strategies that might work better for the individual child. The individual meetings are a meaningful time for Guides to better understand their students, and for children to better understand themselves and their personal learning style.

Every Elementary classroom has a copy of and is informed by the Common Core standards, or benchmarks, set by the state of California. These documents are a material on the shelf available to any student, and students are encouraged to be accountable for what they are expected to know by the end of their Lower Elementary or Upper Elementary experience. Guides typically introduce this material to students in their final year of the Lower or Upper Elementary class as they prepare to transition to the Upper Elementary or Junior High. They are also used in individual meetings with children who may avoid particular subject areas for which there are benchmarks that must be met.

Assessment

The focus of our educational approach at MMS is engaging, explorative learning that enlivens curiosity and develops the skills needed to become independent, contributing members of society. We assess each student's individual progress throughout the year in a variety of ways:

- Observation: We observe regularly to assess students' ability to repeat activities presented and also go beyond the lessons to accurately apply their knowledge in new contexts.
- Conversation: We meet with students regularly to discuss their work and approach to learning. We ask critical thinking questions to assess their understanding, increase their self-awareness, and support growth.
- Reviewing their work and skills. We assess work for correct answers ¹ and for demonstrated understanding of concepts. Because work can take any form, we listen to their stories and lessons to assess recall and development of ideas; we read their written work to assess progress with mechanics, competence, and style; we examine their 2- and 3-dimensional work to assess progress with artistic skills and ability to express ideas in creative ways. And, we plan our follow-up and future lessons based on these regular assessments.

¹ Although we regularly check work for correctness-accuracy, we do not always mark children's work incorrect. Rather, we note the mistakes they are making and offer lessons to ensure the children know each skill well. We never correct mistakes related to skills the children have not yet learned. Once a child has learned a skill, we correct mistakes enough to ensure progress with learning but not so much that the child will be discouraged. Overcorrection can stop children from continuing to engage with their learning.

We also use multiple sources for assessing student grade level progress on the state benchmarks more formally seasonally -- before conferences and at the end of the year. These tools include:

Reading

- Utilizing the “Running Records” tool for assessing reading level, fluency, and comprehension
- Listening for fluency and discussing stories or books one-on-one
- Facilitating story club and book club discussions
- Reading comprehension tests/assessments
- Observing the ability to follow written instructions

Writing

- Evaluating writing samples with rubrics based on State and National benchmarks
- Participating in editing and drafting processes

Mathematics and Geometry

- Performing regular math and geometry assessments based on State benchmarks to check for progress and knowledge of abstract operations
- Observing and holding conferences to assess understanding of concepts

Learning Support

Marin Montessori School is committed to supporting each child's growth as a learner. Our Montessori environments are designed to meet a wide range of learning profiles through hands-on materials, individualized lessons, careful observation, mixed-age communities, and close relationships between students and guides. Children are encouraged to follow their interests and develop passions as they reach academic goals for their age level.

If a child appears to need additional support, our school collaborates with families to understand what is being observed, identify appropriate classroom strategies, and determine whether additional outside support or external evaluations may be necessary. Depending on a child's age and needs, support may include classroom accommodations, reading or writing support, consultation with the Learning Support team, Student Support meetings, or recommendations for outside evaluation or services.

MMS provides limited learning support services, with a particular focus on early literacy. We recognize that some children may need support beyond what our school can provide. In those cases, MMS may recommend that families consult with pediatricians, local school districts, insurance-based providers, or private specialists such as speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, educational therapists, psychologists, or other appropriate professionals.

Our goal is to communicate clearly, respond thoughtfully, and partner with families while keeping each child's strengths, development, and potential at the center of our conversations.

Elementary Learning Support

What services do we provide?

At the Elementary level, individualized lessons, hands-on materials, project-based work, and a strong multi-age classroom community make learning accessible for a wide range of students.

MMS' Learning Support team works primarily to support literacy development for students in the final year of Primary and in Lower Elementary. We focus significant resources on literacy because it is a common area of learning difficulty and because the years between ages five and nine are especially important for reading development. Our aim is to support students in developing reading fluency and appropriate comprehension by the time they complete Lower Elementary.

For Elementary students, classroom support may also include accommodations or strategies identified by the guide, Level Director, and Learning Support team. Examples may include additional check-ins, modified expectations, noise-canceling headphones, behavior support strategies, or other learning tools.

How will the school know if my child needs support?

At the Elementary level, MMS uses formal and informal assessments, classroom observations, and ongoing guide reflection to understand each child's learning profile.

Reading fluency and comprehension are assessed each fall. Students in the final year of Primary and Lower Elementary who are found to be below grade-level expectations may receive literacy support. If your child is recommended for learning support, the school will communicate with you before services begin.

Elementary guides also meet regularly with the Level Director and Learning Support team to discuss students who may need additional support and to develop classroom strategies.

What happens if the guide has a concern about my child's learning?

If a guide has a concern, the guide will observe the child, gather information, and consult with the Level Director and Learning Support team. The guide will communicate with parents about the concern and the strategies being used in the classroom.

If concerns continue, the school may schedule a Student Support meeting. These meetings may include the guide, Level Director, Director of Learning Support, parents, and any outside providers working with the child.

What happens if I have a concern?

Parent observations are an important part of understanding each child's strengths and growth areas. If you have a concern about your child, please reach out first to your child's guide. The guide knows your child well in the classroom setting and is an important partner in understanding what may be happening.

If you have already spoken with the guide and would like additional support or context, you may also contact the Level Director.

What kinds of support can MMS provide, and what may be beyond our scope?

MMS is able to support many learning profiles through Montessori practice, classroom accommodations, guide observation, and targeted literacy support. At the Elementary level, MMS provides reading and writing remediation primarily in Lower Elementary. Support outside that scope is provided by classroom guides with guidance from the Level Director and Learning Support team.

When a child's needs appear to be beyond the scope of what MMS can provide, the school may recommend outside support, a formal assessment, or, in some cases, a different school setting that may be better able to meet the child's needs.

If MMS agrees that a child would benefit from additional academic support beyond what the school can provide directly, families may request permission to hire an outside tutor or specialist to work with the child on campus during the school day. Any such arrangement must be reviewed and approved by the school in advance and must be compatible with the child's schedule, the needs of the classroom community, and the school's policies and procedures.

MMS is also committed to maintaining a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for all children and adults. There may be circumstances in which a child's needs exceed what the school can safely or appropriately support within the Elementary environment. This may include behavior that is physically destructive to the child, other people, or the environment; behavior that is physically threatening; or behavior that creates an emotionally threatening environment for other children or adults. In these situations, MMS will work with the family to understand the concern, consider appropriate next steps, and determine whether additional support, outside evaluation, or a different setting may be needed.

Who works with Elementary students?

The Elementary Learning Support team includes the Director of Learning Support, Reading Specialist, and Elementary Support Guide.

How is support monitored and communicated?

If an Elementary child is receiving literacy support, progress updates will be included in conferences and end-of-year reports. Families may also reach out to the guide or Learning Support team to discuss progress and strategies for supporting the child at home.

If a child has a Student Support Plan from MMS, the Director of Learning Support will reach out early in the school year to review and update the plan as appropriate.

How long does support last?

Literacy support continues as long as the guide and Learning Support team determine that it is needed. Students without a diagnosed literacy challenge typically exit support when they meet the appropriate benchmark. Students with a diagnosed literacy challenge may continue with reduced support after meeting the benchmark and may exit when they are working beyond the benchmark.

If a student continues to need learning support at the end of Lower Elementary, the Learning Support team will meet with parents and Upper Elementary guides to discuss strategies for ongoing support. Upper Elementary guides and assistants, with support from the Elementary Support Guide, work to support students' learning needs. If additional support is needed, MMS may recommend a formal assessment or work with an outside specialist.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT DURING THE ELEMENTARY YEARS

The Elementary Child

The Montessori approach to education was developed using observation and the scientific method to identify the characteristics of children at each stage in their development. Once those characteristics were identified for children, the curriculum, materials, and lessons were created to capitalize on these inherent traits at each level. Our work is based on a robust understanding of and appreciation for our students.

So, what do we know about elementary children?

They have insatiable intellects. They are interested in a vast number of topics and have an incredible capacity to explore new ideas. They are motivated to achieve intellectual independence. So, we offer them the universe. We offer every subject, via beautiful materials and inspiring lessons that capture their curiosity. We offer opportunities to work hard in pursuit of understanding. And, we offer them the time and space to study topics until their curiosity is exhausted.

They are absorbers of culture. They want to learn how to become members of their societies. They want to know what others appreciate and frown upon, and they want to know how to

operate in partnership. So, we offer the freedom to talk with peers, discuss work, and problem-solve with each other. We offer opportunities to work through collaborations and conflicts. We offer guidance when needed. We offer opportunities to go out into the larger community to learn how to operate in the world. And, we offer Big Work. This is work that involves multiple subject areas and collaboration. It is where the children's intellectual pursuits and social exploration intersect.

They want to find the ways that they can contribute to their communities and to the world. So, we offer lessons with a focus on the contributions made by plants, by animals, and by people past and present. And, we offer opportunities to be of service in our classroom communities, in the school community, and beyond.

Grace and Courtesy: Social/Emotional Education and Classroom Management

Grace and Courtesy lessons are those lessons that Guides offer on a regular basis in order to help their students to navigate safely and courteously in classroom environments and throughout their lives. Guides observe in order to identify the lessons that are needed by individuals and by the group. In addition to lessons based on observed needs, Guides give regular lessons that offer students opportunities to practice self-regulation, social skills, and how to contribute to community life.

Conflict Resolution

It is our goal that students will learn the tools they need to be able to gracefully manage any social dynamic they might encounter, including disagreement and conflict. In order to do this, they need to experience disagreement and conflict and have opportunities to practice navigating both. They learn critical lessons from experiencing their peers' responses to their social experimentation and their behavior. In an effort to support their growth and independence in this area, we sometimes observe without intervening. When conflicts need facilitation support from adults, we ensure that all participants are present and use the following process:

- Help children find a sense of calm before trying to process conflict.
- Invite each child to share his/her experience/perspective by encouraging the use of "I" statements.
- Invite each child to tell the individual or group what they need in order to feel better.
- Invite each child to tell the individual or group what they will do to make things better moving forward.

Discipline Policies

When student behavior needs to be addressed, it is our hope that Grace and Courtesy lessons, conflict resolution support, and natural consequences will be enough to effect needed changes. If they are not, we adhere to the following policies:

[Lower Elementary Discipline Policy](#)

[Upper Elementary Discipline Policy](#)

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Daily Schedules

Lower Elementary

7:55 to 8:05	Arrival
8:10 to 11:15	Work Time
11:30 to 12:00	Lunch
12:00 to 12:30	Playtime
12:30 to 12:40	Clean up and return to classrooms
12:40 to 1:10	Silent Reading
1:10 to 2:15	Work Time
2:15 to 2:45	Clean up, circle, and read aloud
2:55	Dismissal

Upper Elementary

8:10 to 8:20	Arrival
8:25 to 11:25	Work Time
11:30 to 12:00	Playtime
12:00 to 12:30	Lunch
12:40 to 1:10	Silent Reading
1:10 to 2:30	Work Time
2:30 to 3:05	Clean up, circle, and read aloud
3:10	Dismissal

Arrival and Departure

Click [here](#) for detailed arrival and departure information.

Communication with Guides

MMS uses ParentSquare as our primary communications tool. If you need assistance logging in to ParentSquare, please reach out to Terry Dubow at tdubow@marinmontessori.org.

Please see below the other communications tools we rely on:

- **Parent Conferences:** Our most essential communication happens during the fall and spring conferences when we strive to ensure that you hear what we know about your child, that we hear what you know about your child, and that we are aligned. Parents will receive written reports at the conclusion of each conference.

- **Parent Education:** These events are also important moments for learning about what your children do here all day and how to best support them at home.
- **Email, phone calls, and meetings beyond conferences:** It is sometimes necessary to have additional interaction beyond conferences and parent education. Your child's Guide will offer the best ways to reach them during Back to School Night.

There are a couple of things we would like you to keep in mind when reaching out to your child's Guide:

- We want to be in a productive conversation with you. We want to be partners in the venture of supporting your children's learning and growth. And, we know that this takes effective communication.
- Each week, MMS Elementary Guides have five hours of work time outside the classroom. This time is used to plan and record lessons, join meetings, and respond to phone calls and emails. Emails, especially lengthy ones, can take Guides up to an hour to respond to. For this reason, we ask that you are mindful of the Guides' time. We want Guides to have as much time as possible to plan lessons and prepare for their students. Thus, if communications can wait until conferences, please bring your questions there. Of course, Guides happily have more frequent communication with families when needed.

Observing in Classrooms

Observation is the best way to get a glimpse of what your children experience at school every day. As this is often very different from your own school experience, it is an important step in understanding your child. Through classroom observation, you will discover:

- The work your child has chosen and the way they interact with the materials.
- How they socialize with their peers.
- Things about the community that will help you start conversations with your child.
- The unique personality of each child, as well as the general developmental characteristics of elementary children.

Observation sign-ups will be sent out via ParentSquare early in the school year. When coming in for an observation, please check in at the school office. When coming into the classroom, please observe the following guidelines:

- Please use a quiet voice; only the person you are talking to should be able to hear your voice.
- Please sit on designated observation chairs.
- Please remember that this is your child's place of work, and as an observer, you do not want to distract from the meaningful work of the children.

Parent Education Events

Click [here](#) for a calendar of Parent Education Events this year.

Additional Parent Participation Opportunities

We appreciate your volunteer support as it helps the classroom and school run smoothly. Here are a few ways you can be engaged with the classroom:

- Volunteer to support classroom events.
- Share skills or expertise such as cooking, knitting, architecture, geology, or the Supreme Court. Let your child's teacher know if you have any you would like to share.
- Care for class pets.
- Support your child to be on time for school, and avoid making appointments during school hours. This practice ensures your children have ample time to complete their work and helps your children see that you value their work time at school. When students miss class time in the Elementary, it also affects their peers' work, as much of their work is collaborative.

Dress Guidelines

Elementary children should wear comfortable clothing that will allow for active work and play without restricting their movements. Students are expected to dress appropriately for school and school activities. Clothing should fit and be functional for both the classroom environment and for outdoors. Children should wear closed-toe shoes.

Snacks and Lunch

Parents are encouraged to provide a healthy, well-balanced lunch with no empty calories in resealable containers that are easy to open and close. So that you know how your child is eating, we will send back all uneaten food. Keep in mind that even small containers of yogurt are often too much for younger children to eat and have to be put into the garbage. A very small amount in a reusable container that can be returned home creates less waste.

Please invite and involve your child in preparing lunch for school, and later, in cleaning out the lunch container at home. This extends the Montessori classroom experience by allowing your child to make choices, assume responsibility, and develop independence.

In the Elementary, children provide their own snacks. A snack is a small, simple item such as a piece of fruit, a container of crackers, or cut vegetables. If your child is someone who needs a little bit of fuel during the day, please encourage them to pack extra food as a snack in their lunch.

Please avoid sending in any foods that are highly processed or high in refined sugars such as:

- Chips
- Lunchables
- Go-GURT, drinkable yogurts
- Juice boxes
- Candy
- Gum
- Carbonated beverages
- Desserts such as Jell-O or sprinkled yogurt

Allergies: Due to the significant number of students who have severe peanut allergies, we ask that you refrain from sending peanuts, peanut butter, and other peanut products in your child's lunch and snacks.

We focus on reusing, recycling, and respect during lunch. As always, our goal is to have zero waste each day.

Re-use:

Plastic bags, waxed paper, foil, plastic wrap, paper towels, etc., all end up in landfills, so please be sure that reusable containers are used to bring lunch and a snack. This aids your child in developing earth-friendly habits from the start!

Recycle

We have a place to recycle glass, paper, and plastics that are "cups, jugs, or tubs." We ask that lunch items packed in single-use plastics, especially those that cannot be recycled, be left at home.

Respect:

As the children become more responsible for their own lunches, they gain respect for the work it takes to provide and prepare their food. This includes being a part of the steps necessary to provide for their lunches. They can help plan and shop for foods they like and that are nutritious. This can be a challenge at times, but it is important to have a lunch that they will eat. We ask that all Elementary students prepare their own lunches. Please consider this activity as part of your child's nightly homework. The children need to be able to open their food containers on their own. Please take that into account, as some food packaging isn't child-friendly.

Going Out / Field Trips / Class Trips

Going Out is the Montessori term for off-campus excursions taken by small groups of two or more children to visit museums, galleries, stores, and other places where subject-matter

experts can be found or hands-on experiences can be had. Going Out is initiated, planned, organized, and carried out by the students themselves as a meaningful or intentional extension of studies or projects they are pursuing in the classroom. Dr. Montessori was adamant about the importance of developing the children's intellectual knowledge, their "real world" social skills, and self-reliance by means of these excursions into the larger world outside the school. We intentionally limit the number of books and other information sources available on campus so that the children will be motivated to go off-campus in search of what they need.

Going Out encourages the growth of children's sense of responsibility for their own safety by helping engender their ability to think clearly and make sound choices in taking care of themselves well before they reach the age to leave the house without their parents.

While Going Out trips are planned by the child, Field Trips are planned by the teacher. They are usually community events that are suitable for the whole class.

Class Trips are planned for the Elementary classes each year. The children from Elementary classrooms go with their Guides on an extended classroom trip. The trips are centered on community building and teamwork activities led by specially trained counselors. The class trip schedule is posted on our [Elementary Key Documents](#) page.

Homework

Homework in our Montessori Elementary classes differs from traditional academic homework based on worksheets, textbooks, and assignments. Montessori homework includes opportunities, provided by the parents, for the children to both consolidate and expand on the knowledge they are working with in the classroom. Inevitably, these real-world experiences will also spark new questions and other interests that the children will bring back to the classroom. This will not only enrich their lives but also the lives of their classroom community.

Your child's "homework" in the Elementary is:

- To read for at least 30 minutes.
- To pack their own lunch.
- The most important work that children can do at home is to contribute to home life and to have outlets to pursue their interests and passions.

Birthdays / Celebrations

Classrooms celebrate birthdays throughout the year. The children whose birthdays are observed in a given month organize a special activity for their classmates.