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Creative Minds Montessori School welcomes you and your child into our community. This handbook is to familiarize parents and students with Creative Minds Montessori School policies and procedures. Please read it carefully and do not hesitate to ask for clarification on any issue.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Creative Minds Montessori School is a diverse educational community based on the teachings and beliefs of Maria Montessori. Our school provides a safe and caring environment for children to realize their natural strengths and to develop self-confidence, self-trust and self-direction. Life skills that benefit the whole child are emphasized, including peacemaking, conflict resolution and creative problem solving.

Our educational process focuses on nurturing the innate love of learning that all children possess and guiding children toward taking ownership of their own education. Compassion and empathy are developed through awareness of global concerns and active participation with local charitable and activist organizations. Students learn that they can effect change in their world through concrete activities in their community.

We are a close-knit family in which parent involvement is encouraged and valued as a vital and irreplaceable asset to our school.

## **CMMS HISTORY**

Creative Minds Montessori School (CMMS) was founded to fulfill the desire to provide a Montessori school that is truly controlled by teachers and parents, with the teachers given all of the support needed to educate our children with compassion and intelligence. CMMS was created by a small group of parents along with our founding teachers, Fran Gilmore, who directs the elementary class designed for 6 to 9 year olds, and Jill Guenther, directress of the primary class for children aged 3 to 6. Both teachers are well-known in the Montessori community, and bring with them the wealth of many years' experience in Montessori education.

"She (the directress) understands and believes that the children must be free to choose their own occupations just as they must never be interrupted in their spontaneous activities. No work may be imposed – no threats, no rewards, no punishments."- Maria Montessori

## **ORGANIZATION**

Creative Minds Montessori School is a not-for-profit organization. Our board is made up of teachers, parents and interested members of the community on a volunteer basis. It operates through committees and other volunteer efforts to provide the management, operation and maintenance of the school. Board meetings are open to all and, along with

parent meetings, are a means of communication and involvement between all members of the school family.

"The Teacher, when she begins work in our schools, must have a kind of faith that the child will reveal herself through work. She must free herself from all preconceived ideas concerning the levels at which the children may be."- Maria Montessori

## CMMS PHILOSOPHY

Our educational philosophy is based on the methods of Dr. Maria Montessori and begins with respect for the child's natural ability and desire to learn. From that foundation we provide affirmative and stimulating educational environments that facilitate each child's individual progress, encouraging students to learn experientially and develop skills for critical thinking and problem solving. Montessori students are noted for their independent thinking and self-confidence. The goal of a Montessori education is the development of a well-integrated personality. Careful attention is paid to development of the child's social skills and feelings of self worth. The ability to resolve conflict in a positive, non-violent manner is modeled and encouraged. Respect for and tolerance of others is stressed. Children learn to become balanced individuals, ready to become optimistic, contributing members of the world community.

"Our goal is not so much the imparting of knowledge as the unveiling and developing of spiritual energy." - Maria Montessori

## CMMS CURRICULUM

**Trust the Child.** Montessori education is powerful because it is based on the belief that children are natural learners who flourish when given gentle guidance and the freedom to work at their own pace. Our core curriculum follows Montessori philosophy and is based on the progressive stages of children's individual cognitive and emotional development.

Our enriched Montessori curriculum includes math, language, science, history, geography, art, music, theatre arts, physical education, foreign language, sign language and conflict resolution. All disciplines are integrated in activities on a daily basis. In each classroom the children have a wide range of activities from which to choose. Field trips and research are an important part of the elementary curriculum.

**Practical Life.** Practical life activities include experiences in caring for the environment, caring for the person and developing grace and courtesy. This facilitates the development of problem solving skills, muscular coordination, concentration and independence.

**Mathematics.** Mathematics is based on concrete sensorial materials, which represent the materialization of abstract ideas. Each idea or concept is isolated in a logical sequence. Through repeated manipulation of the materials the child discovers concrete understanding of abstract concepts.

The sequence includes quantities and symbols from zero to ten, overview and function of the decimal number system, linear counting, memorization of math facts and learning addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. This continues with fraction and decimal operations, graphing, measurement, probability and functions, geometry and algebra.

**Cultural Studies.** Students experience the world through geography, history, music, zoology, botany, biology, chemistry, physics, anatomy and the arts. Timelines, puzzle maps and land form models help orient the student in time and space. Older students develop research and reporting skills, and learn to synthesize information from multiple sources.

**Language.** Students study the parts of speech, grammar and sentence analysis. They learn to write stories, poetry and essays and how to communicate clearly and effectively in writing. Reading is integrated into all areas of the curriculum.

**Science.** Children are provided the opportunity to explore the physical world in a hands-on Science program that focuses on developing skills in critical thinking, problem solving and using a variety of tools to observe and collect data from the world.

"With regard to the child, education should correspond to them, so that instead of dividing the schools into nursery, primary, secondary and university, we should divide education in planes and each of these should correspond to the phase the developing individuality goes through."-Maria Montessori

## **BEHAVIORAL GUIDELINES**

At Creative Minds Montessori School, the development of social skills in the child is as important as the development of academic skills. The ability to control the will assists the child in becoming a productive member of society. We work to create peaceful classrooms where individual differences are respected and diversity is celebrated. We work with our students to develop effective communication and conflict resolution skills so they understand that conflict is an inevitable part of life, and there are nonviolent solutions to problems.

If a problem arises, we try to identify the cause and help change the factors that caused the problem. Most problems are solved by guided discussion among the individuals involved. The following are behavioral guidelines for children and adults while at CMMS and its functions. They are as follows:

☀ Safe and proper behavior is expected throughout the building, on field trips, and in the outdoor environment. This includes playing safely on the play yard, and not running through the building or along the walkways.

☀ Students will exercise self-control during class and group time. This means not disturbing classmates. A child's behavior should not interfere with others' learning time.

- ☀ Students will listen to and following the direction of the adult in charge.
- ☀ Students will be considerate of each other's feelings. We do not tolerate persistent teasing or making fun of others.
- ☀ Students will not fight or exhibit aggressive or inappropriate physical contact. They will use words to solve problems.
- ☀ Students will speak and listen respectfully to fellow students and to teachers or other adults.
- ☀ Students are expected to wait their turn to speak and to use appropriate language, even during heated discussions or disagreements. Any word used with the intent to degrade another is not allowed.
- ☀ Rational disagreement is encouraged, back talk is not.

### Consequences of Inappropriate Behavior for Students in Order of Implementation:

- ☀ Behavior is brought to the child's attention. At this point, conflict resolution is encouraged and facilitated by a teacher or a student "Peace Keeper".
- ☀ If necessary, child is given time to think about behavior. Teacher will talk to child about behavior, offering solutions or clarification of problem.
- ☀ If behavior persists, teacher will arrange a formal conference with the parents at which time a plan will be established.

In a situation where a child becomes angry and decides to use physical violence, the child will be asked to leave the school immediately. This suspension consists of the day of the incident and the following school day.

If the above methods do not resolve the problem, the child may be suspended from school and will only be readmitted when the child and parents show progress in resolving the problem. Continued and unresolved behavioral problems, or failure of parents to follow through on a recommended course of action, may result in the dismissal of the child from the school.

**Disruption by Parent.** Creative Minds Montessori School reserves the right to cancel the contract for any child if the behavior of his/her parent(s) is disruptive to the harmonious relationship between CMMS staff, parents or children or is excessively demanding of the time or attention of the CMMS staff. Parents will be given 30 days notice for withdrawal unless the parent's behavior is immediately harmful to staff or students, in which case, CMMS will require immediate withdrawal of the child.

**Miscellaneous.** Both indoor and outdoor environments of CMMS are non-smoking areas.

We discourage CMMS parents from hiring CMMS teachers for work away from school, and assume no liability for any problems that may result. Tutoring on campus is acceptable.

## **PARENT CONFERENCES AND STUDENT EVALUATIONS**

Formal parent conferences are scheduled three times during the year to discuss your child's progress and exchange information. The dates of these conferences are noted on the school's calendar. These conferences are important. Conferences are normally short, about 20 minutes in length.

If at any time during the year you would like to confer with your child's teacher, please contact the teacher and arrange for a mutually convenient time to meet. Teachers generally are unable to have a conference with you at arrival or dismissal time or while in the classroom.

Although CMMS does not give letter grades, teachers prepare individual narrative evaluations. Standardized tests are administered to elementary students to give them experience in taking standardized tests and provide an additional piece of information about their progress. However, we do not believe these tests should receive as much emphasis as the teacher's evaluation, since they do not give an in-depth evaluation of the whole child. Standardized test results are included in the final evaluation of the year.

*"We must give the child relaxation from the continuous direction of adults. So we give them the right environment, relaxation and freedom from orders. This is an indirect treatment; it is not the correction of the individual but the preparation for a new life."- Maria Montessori*

## **CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

A Montessori classroom is unique in that it can accommodate a broad range of special learning needs and abilities. However, we sometimes encounter children with unique learning styles that make it difficult for them to function successfully in our classrooms. Creative Minds Montessori School reserves the right to refuse admission to any child who cannot be reasonably accommodated due to cost or to the effect on the classroom environment.

Special needs students may require individualized help beyond that which we are able to provide in the classroom. Parents will be asked to attend a planning conference, during which the child's special needs will be discussed along with appropriate intervention strategies, such as therapy, counseling or remedial tutoring. Often a diagnostic evaluation by a professional is recommended to help in the assessment.

If you are asked to arrange for testing or intervention, we expect you to do so within an agreed upon time period. Failure to do so will result in denying admission to the school or asking you to withdraw your child within 30 days.

So that we can better assess a child's needs, we often request that parents provide us results from previous tests or arrange to have a current diagnostic evaluation on your child. By law and in the interest of confidentiality, we cannot require you to turn over any evaluations of your child, but those evaluations are often of value in helping us define and meet the needs of your child. If requested by a parent, school districts by law are obligated to provide comprehensive evaluations of children in their district. The application process is time consuming and rigorous, but in the end it can be beneficial and save you considerable expense.

## ATTENDANCE

Please call the school as early as possible to tell us the reason for your child's absence. Let the teacher know in advance if you will be away from school for an extended period of time, in order for her to prepare work for your child to take along.

**School Hours.** The school is open at 7:30. Children are expected to arrive and be ready to work by 8:30 am. Dismissal is at 3:00 p.m. We are not set up for outside drop off, but outside pick up is available. Parents should walk their children into the classroom in the morning, and pick them up at the designated area at 3:00.

Aftercare and after school activities are offered at an additional cost and described elsewhere. If you know that you will be late and have not enrolled in aftercare, you may sign up for after care when you drop off your child or call the school during the day.

If you do not pick up your child after fifteen minutes of their designated dismissal, you will be responsible for a late charge. Episodic after school care is payable on the day your child has attended the program.

You must notify us in writing if someone other than a parent or person designated on the emergency form is to pick up your child. Children will not be released to an unauthorized person. Photo identification will be required.

**After Care.** The After Care program is designed to meet the needs of working parents by providing safe child care Monday through Friday care is provided from 3:00 to 5:30 p.m. Please refer to your After Care contract for further information.

## HEALTH ISSUES

A child, who is running a fever, vomits or shows any other signs of a contagious disease in the morning before school, should stay at home.

Keep your child at home if your child

☀ has a fever or has had one during the previous 24 hours,

☀ is taking the first 48 hours of an antibiotic medication,

☀ has a heavy or green nasal discharge,

☀ has a constant cough,

☀ has a symptom of a possible communicable disease (i.e. sniffles, reddened eyes, sore throat, headache, abdominal pain or fever).

**Emergencies.** Emergency numbers must be kept current so parents can be reached in case of emergency. If you work outside of Fort Myers, please list someone nearby the school on your emergency form. If we can't reach anyone on the emergency form and your child requires medical attention, we will contact the physician listed on the emergency card or an emergency room and accompany the child to the medical facility. We will wait with the child until you arrive. Emergency information and procedures should be firmly settled before your child is enrolled in school. Please notify us in writing immediately of any change in home address, home phone, work phone, or friends or relatives who can be responsible for your child in case of emergency.

Should your child become ill with a temperature, sore throat, etc., while at school, you will be notified. Should any accident occur on the playground which requires medical attention or any care other than a bandage or ice, you will also be notified. If there are any minor bumps or bruises during the day, we try to let you know when you pick up your child from school.

If your child is diagnosed as having a communicable disease, please inform your child's teacher as soon as possible. We will then send home a notice to forewarn other parents of possible exposure.

**Head Lice.** Head lice are a common problem for children in child care and school settings. Controlling and eliminating outbreaks is an ongoing challenge requiring constant vigilance on the part of parents and teachers.

In an effort to be proactive, CMMS teachers will occasionally check children for head lice. At that time, or at any time head lice are found, parents will be called and asked to immediately take their child home for treatment. The child may not return to school until she or he has been treated with recommended lice killing shampoo, lotion or rinse, and no lice or viable nits are seen.

The Board may terminate the contract of children who continually introduce lice into the school.

**Medication.** If your child must be in school while taking medicine, we ask that you carefully follow this procedure:

- ☀ Do not pack medication of any kind (including vitamins) in your child's lunch box.
- ☀ A parent must give medicine to a teacher who will place it in the school refrigerator.

You will be asked to sign a form allowing us to administer medication to your child. This form includes the dosage and time of day it is to be administered.

## **EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

Please abide by the public school announcement of school closing due to severe weather. If the school needs to be closed early due to the weather, we will notify you immediately to make arrangements for your child to be picked up. Fire drills will be held monthly.

*"And gradually we educators are confronted with a simple but important fact: that to help the child is not what he needs, and indeed that to give help is an impediment for the child. Therefore he must be allowed to act freely on his own initiative in this free environment." - Maria Montessori*

## **LUNCH**

Lunch provides a great opportunity for your child to practice making good choices and being responsible for his or her personal needs. Have the child share the responsibility of shopping and planning for their week's worth of lunches. Packing and getting the lunch to school should be the job of a child in the elementary classroom.

Please keep nutrition in mind when packing lunches. Usually, if a child is faced with a cheese sandwich and chips, the chips are eaten first, followed by very little sandwich. We encourage children to eat their proteins first and save their fruit and other food for last. We ask children to place leftovers back into the lunch box so you will have an idea of how much food your child actually eats.

We support healthful habits among our students. To that end, we ask that children do not bring candy, gum, sugared cereals or sodas to school. If one of the first three ingredients listed on an item is sweet, please omit it. Sugar includes sucrose and glucose and natural honey. We avoid sweet drinks as well. On special occasions such as birthdays and holiday parties, we stretch the rule, but please help keep sugar to a minimum.

## **CLOTHING**

Children should wear comfortable, casual clothing and shoes that allow freedom of motion and participation in active play and sports. Closed tennis shoes are preferred. Flip flops and high heels are not appropriate for daily school activities. We ask that clothing be clean, neat and not distracting (i.e. short-shorts, tube tops, tank tops and halter-tops).

Logos, words or images representing violent ideas, objects or actions are not permitted on items of clothing.

## **PARENT INVOLVEMENT**

Since before Creative Minds Montessori School began, its stability and growth have depended on the commitment of parents to all aspects of the school's operation. Remember – there is no owner or School Board – only the parents and teachers.

The Board of Directors of CMMS is responsible for the long-term health of the school and makes key decisions about school finances and programs. The Board is made up of parent representatives, teachers, and representatives from the community. Nominations and elections for new board members will be held annually.

The Board makes its decisions through a committee process. Parents are encouraged to participate on all committees. Board members or their designees are the leaders of the CMMS Committees (which may be a committee of one).

Board Committees may include fundraising and special events, marketing, facilities, and communications. Parents with expertise in these areas are needed on these important committees. Contact any Board member if you wish to serve.

## **FUNDRAISING**

In a perfect world, tuition dollars would meet all of our school needs. But our world is far from perfect and they do not. Maintaining the excellence that distinguishes CMMS from other independent schools can only be achieved through voluntary support and contributions from our parents and past and present friends. Contributions to CMMS

- ☀ fund scholarships to help children attend CMMS who might otherwise not afford an independent school, promoting diversity in our school community,
- ☀ fund professional development and conference attendance for our teaching staff,
- ☀ allow for program expansion and growth,
- ☀ fund the extra courses and activities that make our children's education well-rounded.

Parental involvement and leadership are critical to the success of CMMS fundraising activities. Parents are to contact the person in charge of fundraising to participate in these activities.

Parents can support fundraising at CMMS by volunteering their expertise in strategic planning, public relations, media relations, communications, grant writing, or anything else.

Interested parents should contact any board member.

Although we recognize and respect that there are differences among our families in their abilities to give of their time, we are a school that relies heavily on parent volunteers to support a variety of activities both in and outside of the classroom. Through volunteerism, parents gain a greater understanding of our school. Parent contributions of expertise, energy, and resources help us keep our operating costs, and thus tuition, as low as possible.

## CMMS TUITION

**Tuition.** Our school is a nonprofit institution. Tuition is set each year by the Board of Directors to cover operating costs. Because of our low teacher-student ratio, most of this money goes to teacher salaries. The remainder goes to educational supplies, our facilities and other operational costs.

Families of continuing students receive notice of the new schedule of tuition soon after it is set by the Board. You will be advised of the due date for the deposit to ensure enrollment for the following year and a schedule of payments for the balance.

Tuition can be paid in one annual installment, two semi-annual installments, or ten monthly installments.

Your balance is due on the first of each month. Invoices are sent after payment is received. Any payment made after the 5th of the month is delinquent and a late fee will be charged. Failure to keep your account current will result in your child's dismissal from CMMS.

**Tuition Assistance.** Creative Minds Montessori School is committed to maintaining an economically diverse student body. To achieve this goal, it is essential that the ability to pay full tuition not be a deciding factor in admitting students to CMMS.

The school's budget provides funds for tuition assistance when possible. This assistance is intended to supplement family resources and awards are made to families whose ability to pay school cost is limited. If you believe that payment of full tuition is beyond your ability to pay, you are encouraged to apply for assistance. Tuition Assistance decisions are made independently from admission decisions and in no way affect an applicant's chances for admission.

The Tuition Assistance Committee considers a number of factors when deciding upon a scholarship: income, assets and liabilities, number of children, other tuition obligations and a variety of other factors. Income tax returns from the previous year must be submitted.

Awards for financial assistance are made for one year only. Parents wanting to renew their award must complete the entire application process again, submitting all forms by

the stated deadlines. The amount of the award may vary from year to year. However, we will do whatever is possible to keep currently enrolled students from one year to the next.

Funds cannot be reserved for families whose application and/or tax forms are received after the stated deadline. Tuition assistance is awarded to those families having low income and substantial need. Waivers vary in size.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

**Pets and Plants.** The care of animals and plants in the classroom is an integral part of the educational experience at CMMS. Please check with your classroom teacher before bringing any pets to school.

**Toys.** We discourage bringing toys to school. But we do encourage children to bring objects that have a cultural or scientific interest to school to share with their class.

**Feedback and Suggestions.** Our faculty and staff welcome comments and suggestions to improve the quality of care of your child. When areas of concern arise, they should be brought to the attention of the classroom teacher who will hear your suggestion and/or grievance and attempt to work through the problem. If additional communication is necessary, the problem can be taken to the Board of Directors.

"The concept of an education centered upon the care of the living being alters all previous ideas. Resting no longer on a curriculum, or a timetable, education must conform to the facts of the human life."- Maria Montessori