



# **Community Handbook 2023-2024**

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## Welcome Montessori Families!

Your child's educational journey determines their destination. Choosing a school is one of the most important decisions you will make for your child and family. We are honored that you have chosen St Augustine Public Montessori School to be a partner with you in your child's education.

Founded in 2012, we are proud to be entering our 11th year as one of three charter schools in the St Johns County School District. We continue to honor Montessori traditions and values and intend to bring the best of innovation in education to our students. Based on years of educational research, we believe that children can and must learn to accept responsibility, develop independence, and make decisions that help manage their own learning.

Please review the information in this community handbook for answers to most of your questions.

I look forward to getting to know each one of you and sharing the next phase of our journey together.

In the service of the child,

***Diane M. Dodds***

**Director**

[diane.dodds@stamontessori.org](mailto:diane.dodds@stamontessori.org)



# About St Augustine Public Montessori School

## Mission

Our mission is to provide students with a learning culture that is grounded in Montessori philosophy and practice that inspires a love of learning, and respect for self, others, and the environment.

## Overview

St. Augustine Public Montessori School was founded in 2012 as a high-fidelity Montessori school that follows the philosophy and methods of Dr. Maria Montessori. We serve children ages 3 years through 12 years in our 3-year cycle programs for Early Childhood, Lower Elementary, and Upper Elementary. Our Montessori-trained teaching and administration staff implement Montessori programming in its entirety, building upon the great success of other public Montessori schools across the nation and Florida. STA Montessori has enhanced the educational offerings in St. Johns County by including a Montessori option as a public school choice.

We emphasize the following essential Montessori principles:

- Prepared environment of Montessori materials and curriculum
- Mixed age classrooms in 3-year spans
- Student choice of activity and uninterrupted blocks of work time
- Integrated instruction where all curriculum subjects are connected
- Individualized, self-paced curriculum, regardless of ability level or age
- A focus on cooperation rather than competition
- Active involvement of children, parents, local citizens and organizations
- Montessori-trained teachers

It is our goal for our graduates to possess the following traits:

- Be independent & take initiative
- Be confident, competent & curious
- Be intrinsically motivated
- Be adaptable and resilient
- Be socially responsible
- Be capable advocates
- Be critical thinkers
- Be effective communicators
- Be citizens of the world

## Charter School Information

A Charter School is a school of choice as part of the St. Johns County School District (SJCS D). The school is governed independently by a non-profit organization Board of Trustees, but is accountable to the SJCS D, the State Department of Education, the children and families of the school and the public. Being a charter school means that this public school has received approval from the SJCS D to teach children using the Montessori Method. The state and federal governments allow the use of alternative approaches in hopes that every child's learning style might be accommodated, and every child will have a successful school experience. As a school established under the charter laws, STA Montessori is required to have a Governing Board that holds the charter contract with the SJCS D and meets periodically to make sure that the mission and vision originally proposed in the charter contract and the Charter School application is being followed.

## Organization

The St. Augustine Montessori Community (SAMC) Board of Trustees is the governing board for STA Montessori. The Board sets policy for the school and hires a School Director, who in turn, hires the faculty and staff of the school and is responsible for overall daily management of the school. Working with the Director, the Board ensures that all laws and regulations are followed, and that the day-to-day operation is consistent with the school's mission. In consultation with an accountant, the Director develops the Budget which is approved by the Board and administered by the Director. The Board develops a fiscal management plan for the school and provides fiscal oversight and direction to the Director. With approval of our Charter Application and agreement to our Charter Contract, the St. Johns County School District is our authorizer and provides oversight, while supporting our autonomy to adopt policies that may differ from District policies. The SAMC is also the non-profit governing board for the preschool (3 and 4 year-old students) tuition-based part of our Early Childhood program.

The Board always appreciates parent input, whether by email or at Board meetings. Since we work as a cohesive unit and in compliance with Florida Sunshine rules, we share conversations with the whole Board, and they become public record. When an issue arises, the Communication section of this Community Handbook will guide you on the proper avenues for raising an issue.

## Board Function

The SAMC Board of Trustees sets school policy, oversees the financial well-being of the school and is responsible for long-range planning. The Board is committed to maintaining the best possible authentic Montessori education for the community we serve. Rather than becoming involved in administrative and operational details which are best handled by the Director, the Board is ideally positioned to look at the big picture and see the best path for achieving the goals and mission as outlined in the Charter Application. We welcome input from you, the community, to help maintain this vision and consistently remind us that what we do is vitally important to you.

The Board is charged with stewarding and strengthening Montessori programs and services, enhancing the school's public standing, ensuring legal and ethical integrity and accountability, ensuring stable financial standing, recruiting and orienting new board members, and long-term strategic planning. Other responsibilities include selecting and collaborating with the Director to provide adequate resources, and ensuring effective organizational planning.

## Board of Trustees

The SAMC Board of Trustees holds regularly scheduled monthly meetings generally on the third Wednesday of each month at 6:00 pm. Other special meetings may be scheduled, as needed. This year the SAMC Board will meet virtually, in the greenspace or in the Multi-purpose Room at least monthly on the dates listed on the school calendar. Notice is also sent through the Community email list.

The Board meetings are open to the public and all parents are invited and encouraged to attend, especially if you'd like to make a comment or hear Board discussion of a particular item. Agendas are emailed out a few days prior to each meeting. If you would like something addressed by the Board, you may request an item be added to the Agenda or you may attend the meeting and

provide comments. Because we must follow set procedures and conduct Board business, members of the audience are asked to refrain from entering into Board discussion during the meeting. The Board can accept and consider questions and comments via email or phone at any time.

Some of our policies and rules are set by federal, state and local laws and would be very difficult for us to change since many stem from our Contract and Charter Application with the SJCS. These policies are in place to provide an ethical, unbiased and legal path by which to hear, evaluate and work to resolve issues.

The Board contact information can be found on our school website ([stamontessori.org](http://stamontessori.org)). Board meeting dates are also posted on our website and school calendar.

## Funding

As a charter school, we receive a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) allotment per pupil from state funding for students in K-6<sup>th</sup>. Since this funding is not enough to cover all operational and budgetary expenses, we rely heavily on the generous support of our community, area businesses, and foundations. The Board of Trustees and its Fundraising Committee continue to seek private and public grant funding for which we are qualified, conduct fundraising events, and seek continued monetary contributions to help our school stay solvent. Every parent can contribute in some way to these efforts and we encourage you to do so.

**Each year we ask parents to contribute what they can afford to the Rise of the Tide (Annual Fund). We suggest \$2000 per student.** This is a small fraction of what the cost would be to receive a private Montessori education. We strive for 100% participation in the Annual Fund so please give what you can even if it does not reach the suggested amount.

## Fundraising

STA Montessori is a non-profit 501(c) (3) organization and all donations to the School are tax-deductible by law. The School provides donors with receipts for annual fundraising and capital campaign gifts. We rely on the on-going support in fundraising for the school.

## Rise of the Tide

Rise of the Tide is our yearly appeal to our community, which bridges the gap between tuition and expenses. Your support is crucial to sustain our educational programming and retain our exceptional faculty. In such a small school, each and every gift has a direct impact. The participation of every family is a measure of confidence in this amazing school and a show of gratitude for what the School offers to your children.

We encourage our entire community – parents, grandparents, faculty, staff, Trustees, alumni, and local businesses – to consider making a meaningful gift so that we can continue our mission. Our priority is to make sure we are able to provide the appropriate learning resources to all of our students.

## Capital Campaign

STA Montessori may hold a capital giving campaign to raise major gifts designated for a specific cause, such as a large renovation, project or new campus.

### **Gifts In-Kind and Non-Monetary**

All in-kind and/or non-monetary gifts must be approved by the Director prior to the donation. Please check with the office regarding the appropriateness of a non-monetary gift or to find out about the needs of the school.

### **Office Hours and Points of Contact**

School office hours are **Monday through Friday from 8:00am until 2:00pm**. The best way to communicate with teachers and staff is via email. If we are not available to answer your call, please feel free to leave a message or send an email and we will respond as quickly as possible. **Please call/email the Office Coordinator for absences or late arrivals no later than 8:15 am.**

Director: Diane M. Dodds [diane.dodds@stamontessori.org](mailto:diane.dodds@stamontessori.org)

(District Compliance, Programs, Academics, Students, Accounts Payable)

Assistant Director: Rebekah Andreu [rebekah.andreu@stamontessori.org](mailto:rebekah.andreu@stamontessori.org)

(Enrollment, Accounts Receivable/Billing, Facilities, School Safety)

Office Coordinator: Holly Fauser [holly.fauser@stamontessori.org](mailto:holly.fauser@stamontessori.org)

(Attendance, Student Records, Social Media, Donation Letters)

### **School Calendar**

STA Montessori generally follows the calendar of the SJCS D with some exceptions for Montessori Guide professional development opportunities. Our academic calendar is posted on our website. Days that school will not be in session are noted and our Extended Day/After School Programs will not be available on these days. Please make your plans accordingly. The School will make every effort to adhere to the scheduled dates listed on the calendar but reserves the right to change this calendar as needed during the school year for extenuating circumstances.

### **Montessori Educational Program Overview**

For more than a century, the child-focused approach that Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian physician, developed for educating children has been transforming schools around the globe. The Montessori educational program considers the needs of the whole child. As soon as you enter a classroom, you know that something is different. Montessori classrooms are immediately recognizable. You will see children working independently and in groups, often with specially designed learning materials. The students are deeply engaged in their work and respectful of themselves and their surroundings. The Montessori Method fosters rigorous, self-motivated growth for children and adolescents in all areas of their development—cognitive, emotional, social, and physical. Montessori education is student-led and self-paced but guided, assessed, and enriched by knowledgeable and caring teachers, the leadership of their peers, and a nurturing environment.

Within the community of a multi-age classroom—designed to create natural opportunities for independence, citizenship, and accountability—children embrace multi-sensory learning and passionate inquiry. Individual students follow their own curiosity at their own pace, taking the time they need to fully understand each concept and meet individualized learning goals.

Given the freedom and support to question, probe deeply, and make connections, Montessori students grow up to be confident, enthusiastic, and self-directed learners and citizens, accountable to both themselves and their community. They think critically, work collaboratively, and act boldly and with integrity. What better outcome could you wish for your children?

Our classroom Lead Teachers and many of the assistants are Montessori trained at Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) approved training centers requiring formal training, practicum requirements and development of albums over several years. Our lead guides hold either American Montessori Society (AMS) or Association Montessori International (AMI) credentials. As a public charter school, most of our Lead Guides hold a Florida teaching license or meet the minimum qualifications for eligibility to obtain one.

Montessori teachers are called “Guides” to emphasize the type of role they have in the child-centered classroom. The Guide’s role is that of a facilitator, guiding the child within the environment and respecting each child’s unique tendencies. Our Guides have high expectations of each child’s academic and personal achievement. In Montessori, the Guide’s aim is to assist the children in moving toward independence, while providing whatever guidance is necessary to ensure that children make good decisions and engage in productive behaviors. The adults give the children more sense of control as they choose their own work. The Guide’s role is to actively observe the children, maintain an inspiring learning environment, give new lessons at the appropriate time and intervene when children need guidance or structure. The children learn more by initiating active involvement with the materials made available by the guide than passively waiting to be given information.

The Montessori Guide is a scientist, a trained observer, who analyzes the classroom after careful, unbiased, systematic observation to determine the specific needs of individual children and the larger shared needs of the community. Montessori Guides design learning opportunities that reflect the scientific observations, preparing the environment to engage children. Guides strive to model the kind of respectful, collaborative learning that we seek to foster in the students. As Dr. Maria Montessori said, “The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, “The children are now working as if I did not exist.”

### **Admissions and Continued Enrollment Process**

As space allows, St. Augustine Public Montessori School will admit children 3-years-old through sixth grade who are eligible to attend school in the St Johns County School District. Our Kindergarten through 6th grade is tuition free as a public charter school. Our preschool program for 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds is tuition based. St. Augustine Public Montessori School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, veteran status, special need, proficiency in the English language, or academic achievement or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law.

## **Enrollment Process and Agreement**

Enrollment is an annual process for every student, both those who are returning and those newly admitted. Enrollment is an agreement between families and school. Parents make a commitment by signing Parent Contracts and completing other enrollment forms prior to their due dates. All returning students who complete re-enrollment forms and meet the terms of the Contract of Commitment will be re-enrolled for the upcoming school year. Rule 6A-1.0955 requires a district parental form for any deviation from a student's legal name. Families residing in the St. Johns County School District (SJCSD) with children 3 years old through sixth grade that are interested in attending the school will need to follow the student enrollment procedure.

### **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act**

All children and youth must have access to the educational and other services that they need to enable them to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held. Homeless students may not be separated from the mainstream school environment based on homelessness alone. Children and youth who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence are considered homeless. If, due to a loss of housing, a child must live in a shelter, motel, vehicle, or campground, on the street, in abandoned buildings, or doubled-up with relatives or friends, then he/she is eligible to receive services provided under the McKinney-Vento Act. For further information contact Tamara Boettger, at (904) 547-7593 or by email at [Tamara.Boettger@stjohns.k12.fl.us](mailto:Tamara.Boettger@stjohns.k12.fl.us)

There are four steps involved in the student enrollment procedure:

### **STEP 1 - Complete and submit the one-page Application for Enrollment Consideration**

One application must be completed and submitted for each student seeking enrollment. Confirmation of receipt of application(s) will be sent to the email provided. If a confirmation is not received, applicants should check with the office. Application(s) must be postmarked or received via email no later than the deadline date posted on the website to be included in the lottery. Applications received after the deadline will be added to the bottom of the waitlist and considered on a space available basis. Applications are accepted by US Mail or email only. Applications will not be accepted in person.

### **STEP 2 - Lottery results via mail and email**

The Lottery will be held at the school on a scheduled date and time at the school office. A virtual meeting link is posted on our website for those who wish to view the process. Students who are selected will be notified no later than two weeks after the lottery is held. Admission is limited by available space in the applicable grade/program level. Preference is given to siblings of current students and to the children of staff and board members. Preference is given to children with previous Montessori experience.

### **STEP 3 - Campus Tour and Enrollment Information Session**

All accepted families should take a tour as part of the application process. Please visit the admissions tab on our website ([stamontessori.org](http://stamontessori.org)) to schedule one. Prospective Families are encouraged to attend one of our Enrollment Information Sessions.

### **STEP 4 - Complete the Student Enrollment Package**

A Student Enrollment Package will be sent to students who have been accepted. Students who choose to attend must complete and submit the Student Enrollment Package within 14 days of



notification. Students who do not enroll within this designated period will be withdrawn from the accepted enrollment list and must re-apply. Reasonable effort will be made to reach each student using the contact information provided in the application. The Enrollment Package will require proof of St. Johns County residency and immunization records. The Enrollment Package will include a Contract of Commitment that includes the requirements for families to attend Montessori Orientation Classes and contribute volunteer hours.

***Complete details regarding enrollment for Early Childhood, Lower and Upper Elementary are available on the school's website under the Enrollment tab. Any further questions or concerns may be addressed by the school's office administration.***

### **Waiting List**

All applicants that are not admitted through the lottery will be added to a waiting list in the order they were drawn in the lottery or in the order the application is received (if after the lottery deadline). As additional spots become available, families on the waiting list will be notified and provided three days to respond with the initial enrollment form.

### **Classroom Placement**

Class placement decisions are made once all accepted students have been identified. This is likely to be at the beginning of August just before school starts. The optimal dynamic in a Montessori class calls for careful balance of age, gender and the diverse needs and contributions of the children. Teachers are actively involved in placement decisions and the Director makes the ultimate decisions based on best fit considering the broader view of the school population. Parent requests for a specific teacher are accepted and taken into consideration. Parents will be notified of placement decisions prior to the parent orientation.

### **Tuition Policy**

St Augustine Public Montessori School is tuition-free for students K-6th. Families of 3 and 4-year-old preschool children in Early Childhood classes will follow the tuition schedule and policies available on our website ([stamontessori.org](http://stamontessori.org)).

### **Channels of Communication**

STA Montessori aims to maintain regular and clear communication with families. The Director and guides are available by appointment to address parent needs. We have several avenues in place for expressing ideas, suggestions or asking about concerns. Please follow the defined "communication pathway" to ensure that your needs are addressed and that efforts are not duplicated. It is critical to us that everyone feels they have an opportunity to be heard.

### **Communication Pathway**

We welcome feedback and encourage parents to communicate in partnership with the school. Please use the following 3 Steps on the Communication Pathway. We ask that you always start by directly contacting the Guide involved. If you feel the issue remains unresolved, then contact the Director. The Board believes that most issues can be resolved through discussions with the Director.

- **STEP 1 – Guide (concerns in the classroom)** - Any concerns about your child’s classroom experience should be first taken to their guide. If an issue arises that is not routine or cannot be handled in a brief conversation with a guide, parents are asked to set an appointment with the guide to discuss the matter in person or over the telephone rather than discussing the matter during school hours or in front of students. Concerns about larger school issues and policies can bypass the guide step and go straight to the Director.
- **STEP 2 - Director (concerns out of the classroom)** - For school wide or operational matters or if you are unable to reach an understanding with the guide, contact the Director. If necessary, a meeting with parents, guide, and Director can be arranged to address the problem.
- **STEP 3 - Board of Trustees (policy or last resort)** - For policy issues or problems that could not be resolved through the previous steps, contact the President of the Board of Trustees, who will then disclose the issue as appropriate with the rest of the Board or proceed with the Grievance process.

At any step along the communication pathway, a formal grievance may be filed for any disputes or issues. The grievance procedure allows for families to enter a complaint and candidly discuss the circumstances involving the situation without fear of prejudice or reprisal. It is important for all parties involved that a solution is reached as quickly and fairly as possible.

### **Open-Door Policy**

We encourage parent feedback, involvement, and participation. We advocate an honest exchange between all parties, adult and child alike. We are receptive to constructive criticism and suggestions. The Montessori philosophy emphasizes honesty and fairness along with cohesion and unity. It discourages unconstructive or negative comments, gossip, or other behaviors that do not serve to solve problems or make improvements. With this in mind, the School has an open-door policy for the community to voice any questions, concerns, comments, complaints or compliments.

As a school community, we strive to resolve issues directly between the individuals concerned wherever possible, modeling respect for each other. The door is always open to assist in the process of resolving issues or to talk over questions or concerns you may have about the school and its policies. The Director welcomes comments, suggestions or compliments. When information is filtered through multiple sources it is likely less precise or reliable, so we encourage direct communication with those best informed about or able to address a situation.

### **Guide and Parent Communication**

Parent education opportunities allow families a greater understanding of Montessori philosophy and practice that makes the home-school connection more successful. Both the school and parents must respect proper channels of communication to avoid misunderstandings and respect everyone’s time.

When there is something you would like us to know about your child’s evening or morning, please let us know via a written note or email. At departure, we are very general and positive about your child’s day. If either guide or parent has concerns at that time, we can communicate by way of telephone or email later in the day. Please remember that Guides are not available for discussion when children are in their care during the school day or during arrival and pickup. Parents who are concerned about a classroom-related problem should make an appointment with the appropriate

Guide. **All parent-initiated contact, including phone messages and emails, will be responded to within 48 business hours.**

### **Avenues of Communication**

For your convenience, our community has a number of ways to communicate and stay connected. Keep up to date on upcoming events and receive the latest information through handouts, postings, conferences and meetings. Families should also promptly reach out to us for any life changes, so we have your most current information on file.

#### Email

All school emails follow the format [firstname.lastname@stamontessori.org](mailto:firstname.lastname@stamontessori.org). Emails are a convenient way to communicate, but please avoid sending confidential or sensitive information since *all correspondence sent to and from St. Johns County School District is subject to the public records law of Florida. This law provides that any records made or received by any public agency in the course of its official business are available for inspection, unless specifically exempted by the Legislature.* Staff usually respond to emails within 24-48 business hours of receipt.

#### Phone Calls

During school hours, Guides are unable to leave the children to receive calls. If you must communicate a message during the day, please call the office and communicate your request for a teacher callback with administration or leave a voice message. If it is an emergency, please contact the office [\(904\) 342-5350](tel:9043425350) and staff will get a message to your child's guide.

#### Classroom Communication

Most classrooms use the Cluster App as a resource for keeping parents up to date with photos, curriculum mapping, and current events/activities. Guides will send out a monthly email outlining what happened in the previous month and what will be coming in the next month.

#### School Newsletter

The Communication Committee emails out a monthly and quarterly newsletter that contains Montessori education topics, upcoming events, policy reminders, or a change in schedule. Please make sure you take time to read the newsletter each month and that the office has the current emails of each parent.

### **Changes in the Home**

If a significant change occurs in your home, please consider informing your child's Guide as soon as possible. All information will be regarded as confidential. We accept your judgment as to the kinds of changes which may affect your child's behavior, security, and general well-being.

Common causes of distress include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Either one or both parents being away from home for any reason for an extended time
- New person living in the home or new caretaker
- Houseguest and relatives coming to visit
- Illness or hospitalization within the family
- Accident or death within the family

***Child custody decrees must be on file in the office. Any court-approved custody or visitation***

*agreements must be in the student's file. STA Montessori is required to allow parents access to student records, and to the child, unless court documents indicate otherwise.*

## Program Hours

<b>Early Childhood Program</b>	<b>8:00 - 8:15 am</b> Arrival <b>8:15 - 12:00 pm</b> Half Day Session <b>12:00-12:15 pm</b> Half Day Dismissal <b>8:15 - 2:45 pm</b> Full Day Session <b>2:45 - 3:00 pm</b> Full Day Dismissal ( <i>Wednesdays 1:45-2:00</i> )
<b>Elementary Programs</b>	<b>8:00 - 8:15</b> Arrival <b>8:15 - 2:45 pm</b> School in Session <b>2:45 - 3:00 pm</b> Dismissal ( <i>Wednesdays 1:45-2:00</i> )

## Daily Arrival Information

It is a matter of courtesy that children arrive on time, so others are not distracted by late arrivals and your student has a smooth transition to the school day. We appreciate your adherence to our arrival policy. **Arrival starts at 8:00am and ends at 8:15am for all students.**

## Car Line Routes:

<b>Early Childhood</b> students and their siblings	Ballard Street Gate (heading East)
<b>Green Sea Turtle</b> students and their older siblings	7 Williams Street (Southside heading East)
<b>Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Upper Elementary</b> (w/ no EC or GST Siblings)	8 Williams Street (Northside heading West)

## Arrival to School:

- Arrive to wait no earlier than 5 minutes before scheduled start time
- **Do not park and leave vehicle – Drivers should remain in their drivers' seats**
- Boosters and car seats should be placed so that children can be most easily assisted as needed with getting buckled and secure
- **Do not block driveways or roads**
- Drive slowly and with courtesy
- Be mindful of our neighbors, residents, and Trolleys
- Line up as close to the curb as possible
- **All late arrivals will use 7 Williams main office entrance to park and sign in your child**

## ***We urge all families to be especially mindful of the following:***

- Make every effort to drop your child off at school on time – A delay of just a few minutes is disruptive, and makes it harder for your child to begin his/her day in a peaceful manner
- Only written messages should be relayed to guides.
- **Please do not engage guides in impromptu conferences during arrival or dismissal.** The guide's

first responsibility is the supervision of students.

### Daily Dismissal from School

Students should be picked up by the end of their dismissal window. Please do not enter the car line more than 5 minutes prior to the start of the dismissal time frame. This will help ensure that the car line does not get backed up. **Dismissal starts at 2:45 pm and ends at 3:00 pm for all students (1:45-2:00 pm on Early Release Wednesdays).** Please arrive on time for dismissal. Most children find it stressful to be picked up late.

**Children who are not picked up during the dismissal time frame will be signed into the extended day/aftercare program, and will incur a fee of \$25 plus an additional \$2/min.**

### Early Dismissals and Authorized Pick ups

Please make every effort to avoid student appointments on school days. If there is an occasion when you need to pick up your child early for a doctor's appointment or other obligation, please send an email or note to the classroom Guide and the office coordinator with the time to ensure your student is ready. When you arrive at school, please sign your child out from the 7 Williams Street office. Please ensure that all early pick-ups occur prior to 2:15 (prior to 1:15 on Wednesdays) to lessen interference with our regular dismissal processes. If your child is picked up by someone else or is going home with another child, we must have an email or note from you as well. We will only dismiss a student to the parents or people who are indicated on the Approved Pick Up List, unless we receive specific, verifiable permission from a parent.

In the event of emergency circumstances, an individual who is not on your Approved Pick Up List needs to pick up your child, please inform the school office by phone or email. We must receive an email or written note at or prior to morning drop off. This individual will need to present photo identification before your child can be released to them. Parents should call the office to arrange for an Extended Day/Aftercare Program at the daily rate.

### Extended Day/Aftercare

Extended day/aftercare is offered between 3:00-5:30 pm (Wednesdays 2:00-5:30 pm) on most school days. Please refer to the school calendar. Advanced registration is required and payment must be made in advance. If you have an interest in utilizing this program, please reach out to the office for availability, details and pricing information. Since fees are based on our entire academic year, there will not be reduced costs for months with fewer days or more than 1 change per school year. Prepayment is required by the 20th of the month prior to attendance by check or online payment. Cash will NOT be accepted. Checks will not be accepted by aftercare staff. A \$30 fee will be charged for late payments. A \$50 fee will be charged for bounced payments. Late pick-ups (after 5:30pm) from Extended Day/Aftercare will incur a fee of \$25 plus an additional \$2/min. Families with an outstanding balance will not be allowed to attend Extended Day/Aftercare.

Students are dismissed at the Ballard Street gate. Please ring the bell and use the "walkie" to alert our staff that you are here to pick up your child. Only adults specified on your Approved Pick Up List will be permitted to pick-up your child; please be sure that they bring a picture ID. Participation

in the Extended Day/Aftercare Program is a privilege. Students who receive four (4)

behavior-related incidents while in Extended Day/Aftercare, will be disenrolled from the program.

### Attendance

Daily, regular and timely attendance is crucial for your child's success in school. Absences for illness are understood, but please be sure your child only misses school when absolutely necessary. Consistent attendance promotes good work routines and enables the continuity of group collaboration in all classroom levels. Excessive late arrivals or absences (more than 1 time per week) may require a conference with the Director and the implementation of a plan of action to correct the situation. **Excessive late arrivals and absences (more than 15 tardies and/or more than 15 absences) could result in the student being asked to return to the appropriate district school.**

Florida's mandatory attendance laws require STA Montessori to track absences and late arrivals. Our goal is to meet 90% attendance. Please assist our efforts by making sure your child arrives on time, that you sign your late child in, and that you send in a written note to excuse any absence.

Excused absences include the following:

- Illness of child or immediate family member.
- A death in the family
- An observed religious holiday
- A special event of an educational nature with prior permission from the Director
- A unavoidably scheduled doctor/dentist appointment with advance notification

### Emergency School Closings

There may be occasions when it is necessary to close the school for emergencies, such as a hurricane or flooding. If St. Johns County County School District closes, STA Montessori will also be closed. However, there may be an instance where STA Montessori is closed when the public traditional schools are not. A message concerning school closing will be sent out. If school is in session at the time of closing, you will be asked to pick up your child early. It is imperative that all emergency contact information be kept up to date.

### Utilization of Google Classroom during State ordered Emergencies

The School has developed and implemented our own Montessori Distance Learning program that mirrors all aspects of our Montessori program in instances when students cannot safely learn in-person on campus. We have utilized the Google Classroom format to provide digital classrooms for each of our on-campus classrooms, maintaining the community of learners and expanding parent education and support for those taking on additional roles in guiding their students at home. This system remains on standby should state Emergency Orders authorize public schools to utilize such continuing education formats during emergency situations. We will only pivot to this system when authorized to do so in instances where full FTE funding is guaranteed by the Department of Education. This maintains our Montessori education choice for families during unusual times and circumstances.

## Classroom Guidelines

This section contains guidelines for appropriate clothing and student belongings for the classroom and information about birthday celebrations and field trips.

### Student Belongings at School

It is natural for children to want to share things that are special to them with their classmates. Recognizing the important link between home and school, we encourage students to bring in objects of interest that have educational value and are related to ongoing projects in the classroom. If they wish, children may bring a book, something from nature, or similar item to share.

We value interpersonal relationships with our students and want their undivided attention. **Students are not allowed to bring in money, toys or electronics including phones, game devices, music players or tablets.** Any cell phones or other prohibited devices that must be turned off and turned into the guide in the morning will be returned at the end of the day. We are not responsible for items that are brought into the school.

Students are not allowed to bring items such as skateboards, roller blades/skates and scooters to school. Bikes brought to school should be parked in designated areas upon arrival and locked. Students are asked to walk their bikes on school property for the safety of all.

Weapons play or real, are not permitted. We follow the NO TOLERANCE policy of St. Johns County Schools, which mandates expulsion from school if drugs or weapons are brought onto school property.

Backpacks are not necessary and not permitted due to space constraints. Students may bring their lunch box, water bottle, and take-home folder/notebook (Elementary) to school. **Please label these items and all jackets clearly with your child's name.** Please check the school lost and found for items left at school for over 1 week. Lost and found is donated to charity mid-year and at the end of the year.

### Food and Nutrition

#### Allergies

If your child has any allergies or sensitivities, please notify the Director and your child's Guide to fill out the necessary paperwork, and so that we may provide a safe and comfortable environment for all our students.

#### Breakfast

Children's work at school is directly affected by the nutritional quality of their meals. Please provide your child with a nutritious breakfast each morning. A high-protein breakfast that includes a generous portion of vegetables, fruits, and protein is essential to the child's development, learning, and enjoyment at school. This is both the universal experience of our Guides as well as the findings of well respected public health research studies. Good nutrition directly affects a child's health, concentration, and behavior.



### Snack - Early Childhood and Lower Elementary

Students in these programs should bring a healthy snack to enjoy during the morning. Please adhere to the same guidelines used in packing lunches. Some suggested healthy snack items are listed below:

- Any fresh fruit or vegetable
- Yogurt (check for low sugar content) - GoGurt sticks are not permitted
- Protein
- Granola

### Lunch

Children should bring their lunch to school in a clearly labeled lunch box and reusable water bottle. STA Montessori encourages students to bring zero-waste lunches with food in reusable containers with washable utensils, a napkin and placemat. Please prepare your child's lunch in a way that allows the child to independently open containers including all needed utensils. We are not able to refrigerate or microwave student lunches. Include an ice pack for cold foods and a thermal container for hot foods. To facilitate lessons in grace and courtesy, we ask each child to bring a cloth placemat and napkin each day. All uneaten food that can be contained will be sent home or composted. We appreciate your care in helping your child prepare a healthy lunch.

Good nutrition is the first step to a lifelong wellness style. Lunch is an important part of this. We count on parents to work with us in teaching children about good health and nutrition. We all want to pack lunches that our children will eat. The challenge is to help them discover that wholesome, non processed, sugar-free foods can taste better than junk food. With that in mind, we ask that you do not send children to school with sugary desserts and drinks. Read labels and avoid foods with sugar or corn syrup in the first three ingredients. We strongly discourage the use of prepackaged "kid's meals" containing an overabundance of sodium and preservatives and very little nutrition. Gum, sodas, and candy are not permitted.

### **Birthdays and Special Occasions**

Montessori schools all over the world acknowledge children's birthdays in special ways. Parents of the birthday child are invited and encouraged to attend a birthday circle, but your attendance is optional. If you would like to attend one, please coordinate a time with your child's teacher at least one week prior to your child's birthday. Summer birthdays may be celebrated on the half-year date if desired. We celebrate birthdays in our classroom with the traditional Montessori celebration that consists of the child walking around the sun as they carry the Earth to represent each year of their life.

We invite your child to bring any of the following on their scheduled birthday circle day:

- A simple birthday poster with a picture representing each year - Elementary students may want to create a "timeline" of the child's life and write a caption for each picture;
- A book to gift the classroom as selected by your child, so your child has the opportunity to give as well as receive - Assist your child in writing her name or dedication in the inside cover of the book; and
- Fruit salad or fruit kabobs, frozen juice pops, fruit and cheese slices, or muffins - We ask that you save the cupcakes and cake for home celebration and provide a healthier snack for school.



Please be sensitive to the feelings of others and remember if you are planning a birthday party outside of school, we ask that invitations be sent through the mail and not distributed at school.

### Field Trips (Going Out)

Educators will plan educational field trips throughout the school year to enrich the curriculum as well as students' overall educational experience. They are planned to coordinate with subjects being studied by the class or to take advantage of special community opportunities. Notice of upcoming trips will be sent home in advance. Permission slips and any required fees must be returned to school in advance of the trip, or your child may not be able to participate.

Volunteers may be needed to assist in the supervision of children. If you volunteer to chaperone on a trip, please stay with the group of children assigned to you. Younger siblings are not permitted to come along when you volunteer for trips. On the day of the trip, you will be given a handout with further suggestions for making the trip a success. **All field trip chaperones need to have a completed Background Screening.** Please remember that all normal school rules apply on field trips:

- Passengers must wear their seat belts and stay seated at all times
- Hands (or anything else) should remain inside the vehicle
- Transportation should be to and from the location only, e.g. no pit stops for gas or coffee

### Computer Use

Students in our Elementary program will have access to iPads and Chromebooks. Students may use computers with the permission of the staff to work on school-related projects. Email, chatting, instant messaging, social media use and the like are not permitted at school. Students must be mindful and follow the computer etiquette laid out in class at the start of each year. We expect grace and courtesy at all times with respect to computer use. Parents are expected to partner with the school to maintain safe and sensible internet use at home. Parents should be aware of who their children are in contact with on phones or the internet and should have regular conversations about the use of the internet and social media. Access for students should be in public spaces of the home.

### School Media Sites

Some students at our school cannot have their photo taken and some parents do not feel comfortable with their children's pictures being shared or posted. Therefore, it is the responsibility of parents to understand they will not post any pictures taken on campus at any celebrations, etc. on any social internet sites unless you have permission. Anyone found not abiding by our policy may not photograph/video at our school. This policy is in place to protect our students and their privacy.

The school maintains an official school Facebook and Instagram page for the purpose of providing official information about the school and sharing information about Montessori education. The school will occasionally post photos of the children working or playing at school. Photos will only be posted with the parent's consent as completed in the enrollment packet. Students are never tagged in a photo on our page. Each parent must complete a Photo Permission form upon enrollment.

Our PTO group, FRIENDS, also maintains an online presence to support a sense of community by connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about school events, building school spirit, and providing ways for people to dialogue about Montessori education topics. We aim to ensure that our school, students, educators, and families are not compromised on any form of social networking. However, we acknowledge the important role that social media can play in maintaining a sense of community among the families we serve. The following guidelines ensure the privacy, dignity, and rights of the school, students, staff, and families.

### **Community Interaction**

All users interacting with the FRIENDS Facebook page must do so by using a Facebook account that clearly identifies them by their real name. The parent community, employees and board members are personally responsible for the content they publish online. Online behavior should reflect the same, if not greater, standards of honesty, respect and consideration that are used in face-to-face interactions. STA Montessori employees are expected not to initiate or accept student or parent friend requests due to it being a breach of professional conduct.

### **Content**

Confidential and proprietary information about STA Montessori may not be posted. Material that could be deemed as threatening, harassing, illegal, obscene, defamatory, slanderous, or hostile toward any individual or entity may not be posted. STA Montessori employees and volunteers may not speak negatively about the school on social networking sites. Concerns should be addressed through the proper communication avenues listed in this handbook. Social media linked to the School may not be used for the promotion of personal financial interests, commercial ventures, personal campaigns or to promote other businesses. However, School social media accounts may be used to thank local businesses for their support of the school.

### **Online Privacy and Safety**

Last names, addresses or phone numbers of children should not appear in online postings. When contributing online, never post confidential student or school information. Only children's first names may appear on our page. We request permission to post photos or videos of identifiable children both internally and externally in the enrollment packet. If you indicate you do not grant that permission, your student's photos and videos will not be posted unless explicit written consent has been given by parent/guardian. Photos of children at school events may be published and shared internally. Photos of parents/guardians may be posted to promote the sense of community found. Names of parents may be used to acknowledge great work or community involvement.

### **Student Safety, Health & Welfare**

The health and safety of our entire community is of utmost importance to all of us. STA Montessori maintains full compliance with all local and state rules and regulations by providing an environment that is free of all known health and safety hazards. We make conscientious efforts to correct any situation that could endanger the health and safety of students and adults at our school.

### Student Rights

- To attend school in a positive learning environment.
- To have school staff who are receptive to student needs and concerns.
- To be safe from crime, violence, intimidation, bullying, harassment, racism and other discrimination in the school.

### Student Responsibilities

- To maintain decorum that enhances a positive learning environment.
- To express needs and concerns in an appropriate manner.
- To know and obey District and school behavioral expectations
- To report unsafe situations to school or law enforcement personnel

### **Attendance, Truancy, Tardiness, Exemption from School Attendance**

Regular school attendance is a necessary part of a student's education. Excessive absences impair a student's educational progress, impact whether the student passes or fails a grade, and may result in court proceedings. Students will be considered absent when they miss 50% of their school day.

#### ***Excused Absences include the following:***

- ❖ Personal Illness.
- ❖ Illness of an immediate family member.
- ❖ Death in the family.
- ❖ Religious holidays of the student's religious faith.
- ❖ Required court appearance or subpoena by a law enforcement agency.
- ❖ Special events, including, but not limited to, important public functions, student conferences, student state/national competitions that are school-sponsored, administrative approved post-secondary educational institution visitation, as well as exceptional cases of family need.
- ❖ Students having or suspected of having a communicable disease or infestation that can be transmitted are to be excluded from school and are not allowed to return to school until they no longer present a health hazard (Florida Statute 1003.22). Examples of communicable diseases and infestations include, but are not limited to, fleas, head lice, ringworm, impetigo, and scabies. Students are allowed a maximum of three (3) days excused absence for an infestation of head lice.
- ❖ Scheduled doctor or dentist appointments.

#### ***Unexcused absences include, but are not limited to, the following:***

- Shopping trips
- Pleasure trips
- Suspension from school
- Appointments without prior approval except in case of emergency
- Truancy
- Other avoidable absences.

## Clothing Guidelines

Students may dress in a manner that is not distracting, extreme, or disruptive to the educational process. Animated characters printed on shirts, lunchboxes or anything brought or worn to school are not permitted. The Montessori classroom is a prepared environment. The materials, furniture, pictures and posters, books, and music have all been selected to create an ambiance that is conducive to long concentration, higher-level thinking, and creative expression. The clothing worn by the children becomes a part of the classroom environment and has an effect on the ambiance. Just as we would not hang posters of popular movie, TV, or video themes, characters, or scenes on the wall, we also ask that you reserve clothing with such depictions for use outside of school.

The following standards will assist in selecting appropriate wearing apparel for school:

- Closed toe comfortable shoes such as sneakers, appropriate for running, walking, playing, and climbing are required each day at school and for all off campus field trips
- Tops long enough to be tucked in
- Shorts should reach mid-thigh length
- Students should have a pair of shoes to wear indoors at school at all times
- Hats and sunglasses shall not be worn in classrooms
- Students are allowed and encouraged to wear caps or sun hats during outdoor activities
- If your child prefers skirts or dresses, we recommend wearing shorts or leggings under them
- Outerwear, lunch bags and water bottles must also meet the clothing guidelines

The following are prohibited (Please save these for outside of school):

- Super-hero, cartoon, concert, and advertising T-shirts
- Costume-like clothing such as army camouflage, dance clothes, tiaras or costume jewelry
- Sports uniforms
- Attire with violent, vulgar, drug- or alcohol-related themes
- Any sort of advertisement, including large logos or brand names, or media-related characters
- Platform soles, raised heels, cowboy boots, jellies, dress sandals, light up shoes, or flip flops
- Double laces, long shoelaces, or cord or leather shoelaces, which are hard to keep tied
- Socks that have beads or other adornments that make noise
- Buckles, belts, or suspenders children cannot handle by themselves
- Bracelets, dangling jewelry that distracts, or headbands that do not stay on
- Purposeful displays of underwear
- Exposed backs or midriffs
- Distracting make-up

## Toilet Trained for Early Childhood

All students are expected to be fully and completely toilet trained. This means no pull-ups will be allowed. Children must be able to recognize the urge to go and be independent with clothing and wiping themselves in the bathroom.

## Extra Clothing for Early Childhood

Please send in an extra set of clothes (a shirt, pants, underwear and socks). It is helpful when each item is labeled and then put into a clear Ziploc labeled bag with their name on it. It is important that each child has extra clothes available as spills and accidents can happen.

## Required Health Forms

Prior to the first day of class, the office must have your child's completed health forms for compliance with state regulations. Your child will not be able to attend school until the following health forms are completed and received:

- **Florida Certification of Immunization, Form DH680**
- **School Entry Exam, Form DH3040-CHP-07-2013**

Florida Rule & Statutes and downloadable forms can be found on this site:

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/programs-and-services/childrens-health/schoolhealth/enrollment.html>

## Illness

It is understood that all children will be sick at some time during the school year, and illnesses spread through schools very quickly. Each family will need to have a plan in place to provide sick care for their child. As parents and staff, we know that some children may arrive at school apparently well and then become ill during the day. In such a case, we will notify you immediately of your child's symptoms of illness. Because many childhood illnesses are contagious, ill children must be picked up as soon as possible. Please make alternative care arrangements for your child when presenting any symptoms of illness. We must, within reason, do everything possible to protect all children, staff members, and their families from exposure to contagious illnesses.

We understand how difficult it can be to make arrangements when your child is not feeling well, but please keep your child home if any of the following symptoms are present:

- Temperature above 100.4 in the past 24 hours (without fever reducing medication)
- Had vomiting or diarrhea in the last 24 hours
- Severe cough or sore throat
- Persistent coughing or sneezing
- An unexplained skin rash
- Conjunctivitis (pink eye)
- An earache or drainage from the ear
- An excessively runny nose with colored mucus
- A contagious condition (head lice, strep throat, impetigo, pink eye, chickenpox, etc.)
- Mouth sores
- Signs of Concussion (dizziness, lethargy, dilated pupils)
- Severe Asthma
- Suspected bone fracture
- Or any illness that prevents participation in normal school day activities/learning

Children must be free from symptoms for 24 hours before returning to school. If your child develops any of these symptoms while at school, you will be called immediately.

The two biggest factors when deciding whether a child can attend school is whether he or she is well enough to take part in activities and whether the child's condition will require more attention from teachers or staff than is possible.

## Communicable Disease

We ask that every child be in good health and free of signs and symptoms of communicable diseases each day prior to participating in school. The school must be informed as soon as possible of any contagious condition the child may have come in contact with, so the school community may take the necessary action, including notifying the Department of Health and other parents. Our Health and Safety Plan (COVID) contains additional guidelines that will be updated as circumstances change. Please ensure that you read these guidelines carefully and follow them.

## Lice Policy

If a child has been found to have lice or lice eggs, the child must be picked up from school and must be treated immediately. Upon return, the Guides will check to make sure the child's hair is free of lice, lice eggs and casings before they can return to school. Please inform the school immediately if your child has had lice or lice eggs in their hair.

## Emergency Care

In the event of an emergency, the school will call 911 first, so your child may be transported by ambulance to the nearest medical facility. Parents will be contacted immediately following the 911 call. A staff member will accompany the child in the ambulance, in the event the parent does not arrive in time.

## Emergency Contact Information

Parents or their authorized emergency contacts will be notified immediately of any accidents, injuries, or illnesses. For this reason, it is imperative that the office maintains your most current contact information to communicate instances as they may occur. Please keep your emergency contact information up to date. It is the parent's responsibility to notify the office of any changes in the designated emergency contact information. We must be able to reach you at any time during the school day.

## Illness in School

Face masks are optional in school. Adequate supplies, including access to soap and water and/or hand sanitizer, will be provided to support healthy hand hygiene behaviors.

Frequent cleaning and disinfection of shared spaces, objects, etc. will take place.

Students who become sick on campus will be removed from the classroom. The student will be brought to a designated "isolation space" for staff/students who become symptomatic while on campus. A staff member will be with the student until parent/guardian arrives. A school administrator will follow safety and health protocol by reporting all incidents to the St. Johns County Health Department to initiate contact tracing. Contact tracing is a function of the St. Johns County Health Department with help and support of the St. Johns County School District. All essential visitors or volunteers will be subject to St. Johns County School District health and safety protocols.

Symptom criteria from the Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics states students who meet the screening criteria below should be sent home for further medical evaluation for two or more of the following:

Chills, vomiting and/or diarrhea, muscle aches, headache, sore throat,

or a new decrease in smell or taste.

or one of the following:

Fever of 100.4 or higher, uncontrolled cough, shortness of breath

If a student/staff member tests positive with symptoms:

They should stay at home and away from others for five (5) days from the date the symptoms began. They may return to school on day 6 if fever-free for 24 hours and symptoms are improving. If a student/staff member tests positive and is asymptomatic, they should stay home and away from others for five (5) days from the date of the COVID positive test. They may return to school on day 6. If a student/staff member is exposed (within 6 feet in closed space for more than 15 minutes) - If symptoms develop, they should stay home. If asymptomatic, they do not need to quarantine but should watch for symptoms for 10 days. Masks are recommended day 6-10.

### **Prescription and Non-Prescription Medicine**

Only under extraordinary conditions do we administer medication at school. Do not send in any medication with your child including cough medicine or drops, topical creams, or over the counter medications such as Tylenol.

When in the opinion of your child's physician, it is necessary to administer medication during school hours the following procedure will be followed:

- All medication must be transported to and from school by adults only
- Parents must hand any medication brought to school directly to an staff member
- All prescription medication must be in the original bottle that is clearly labeled with the child's name, medication name, time and amount of dosage
- Parents are responsible for administering the first dosage of any new medication at home
- An **Authorization to Administer Medication Form** which can be obtained from the office must be completed before any medication is given
- Our staff members are prohibited from providing or administering any over the counter medication except as authorized in writing by you and the child's physician

### **Levels of Discipline**

We respect each child's emotional needs and learning styles. We use compassionate, respectful language especially when children experience challenging times. Montessori education is based on empowering the student to make appropriate decisions about behavior in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust. There is no place for corporal punishment or emotional intimidation in a Montessori environment.

One goal of our school is for the children to be self-disciplined. There is a wide age span within the range of "normal" for the development of self-discipline. To encourage self-monitoring of behavior by our students, we control the environment, instead of the child, as much as possible. We want it to be easy for the children to behave appropriately. Appropriate behavior is taught when children are not in a stressful situation. Then children can learn by role-playing acceptable alternatives to hitting, screaming, biting, scratching, name-calling, etc. These lessons are given individually and to groups throughout the year as needed. When children have disagreements,



we use peer problem solving whenever possible. When a child breaks a class rule, the children are encouraged to suggest solutions to problems during circle or class meetings. Whenever possible, children are allowed to experience the natural and/or logical consequences of their actions. For example, when you throw a puzzle, you pick it up and then find other work that can be handled more appropriately.

In keeping with Montessori philosophy, we redirect the following behavior patterns:

- Unbecoming behavior (i.e. nose-picking)
- Behavior destructive to the environment (i.e. throwing work)
- Behavior destructive to others or their work (i.e. disturbing another's work)
- Unproductive behavior (i.e. walking aimlessly through the room)

We act on the premise that all behavior has a purpose. Therefore, we help the children sort out the goal or purpose behind their misbehavior, while being firm and consistent in not allowing inappropriate behavior. Any time a child gives or receives aggression perceived by the Guide as excessive, whether it be physical or verbal, the guide will respond with changes in the prepared environment, materials, discussion, mediation, problem-solving sessions, relationship coaching and/or natural or logical consequences, as deemed appropriate by the Guide, in consultation with the director. When a child chooses to disobey rules, they are acting against the common aim of the peer group. Consequently, the child must leave the group. Leaving the group in class could mean:

- Sitting alone or next to an adult with or without working
- Temporarily moving to another classroom
- Going to the office or visiting the director
- Working out a mutually arranged plan between the parent, Guide, and an administrator for logical consequences for the child at home.

## **Code of Conduct**

With our mission in mind, we developed this tiered Code of Conduct (three levels) as a way for our community to understand the Montessori philosophy and the expectations of the classrooms. This also allows the students, Guides, and families to understand rules and consequences when those rules are not followed. Under no circumstances may a staff member use corporal punishment of any sort to discipline a child. Harsh and demeaning language or tones of voice are inappropriate. The use of such disciplinary methods may result in immediate dismissal of an employee.

### Level 1

Behaviors include such things as classroom disruptions, disorderly conduct, disrespect, false or misleading information, insubordination, verbal altercations or minor physical contact (pushing/shoving), between students and/or staff, which is harmful or disruptive.

- Level 1 behaviors will be dealt with Inside the Classroom by the classroom teacher(s) and are recommended that they be documented
- Level 1 behaviors will use Montessori methods described above



Repeated instances of inappropriate behavior must be documented by noting the behavior, date and time. In cases of extreme or persistent behavioral challenges, the Director and parents must be notified. The School is committed to working with parents to resolve such issues. Our goal is to create a positive and peaceful environment for all students; therefore, physical or verbal aggression or violence will not be tolerated. If this occurs at school, the child will be sent home. A parent conference will be required before the child is readmitted to class.

### Level 2

Level 2 behaviors include Level 1 repeated offenses, cheating, plagiarism, destruction of property, disrespect, intimidation/threats, profane, obscene or abusive language.

- Level 2 behaviors will be dealt with by the classroom teacher(s) by scheduling a meeting with the parents and/or guardian of the student to set up an action plan for success.
- Level 2 behaviors are required that all incidents be documented using the incident report.

### Level 3

Level 3 behaviors include physical attacks, repeated behaviors Level 1 and/or 2, or any that are listed in the 3rd or 4th level of behaviors in the St. Johns County School District Code of Conduct. <https://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/schoolservices/conduct/>

- Level 3 will result in an automatic suspension (1-3 days based on the district's policy) Level 3 behaviors will be dealt with by the classroom teacher(s) by calling a parent or guardian to pick the student up, meeting them and writing the suspension report for the student.
- Level 3 behaviors are required that all incidents be documented and entered into Eschool and continue to meet with parents and/or guardians to work on an action plan for success.

We give children the space to express themselves, and we invite them to come to a calm, quiet area so that they can calm down. Children may be required to sit at a table by themselves and work will be provided for them. They will lose their freedom of movement for a period of time according to their development. This could range from a short amount of time to an entire work period. If a child's behavior (for example: temper tantrum) is disruptive to the classroom the child will be taken out of the classroom. Parents will be notified of these situations either by email, phone call, and/or incident

**Admission to the School is by choice, not mandate. Our philosophy is to meet the needs of all children enrolled. Under the terms of our charter application and contract with the St. Johns County school district, St Augustine Public Montessori School is not obligated to retain any student whose needs cannot be met or who cannot progress to and maintain minimum standards of behavior appropriate to an integrated classroom environment.**

St Augustine Public Montessori School will also utilize the St. Johns County School Board Code of Conduct to handle discipline matters including bullying and harassment that occur. The complete text of the bullying and harassment policy is set forth in SJCSB School Board Rule 3.21. This can be accessed

online. The School reserves the right to create its own code of conduct in subsequent years if the governing board and school staff feel this is appropriate.

Suspension, also referred to as out-of-school suspension, is the temporary removal of a student from all classes of instruction on public school grounds and all other school-sponsored activities, except as authorized by the Director, for a prescribed period of time not to exceed ten (10) school days at any one time. Referral to an alternative school is not a suspension, but rather a school assignment.

When a student is accused of misconduct that would warrant suspension under the Code of Conduct, the following procedures shall apply. Before suspension is imposed, students shall be given notice of the provisions of the Code of Conduct they are accused of violating and the factual basis for the charges. Students shall have an opportunity to present their version of the incident before suspension is imposed.

The Director is authorized to immediately suspend a student if the student has physically assaulted another individual, engaged in behavior posing an immediate danger to students or staff, substantially disrupted the orderly operation of the school, or otherwise committed any offense which the Board has determined constitutes a serious breach of conduct. However, in these cases, the student shall still be given oral notice of the allegations and an opportunity to explain or defend the conduct. In these cases where immediate suspension is not authorized in accordance with this paragraph, the Director or Assistant Director should make a good faith effort to seek parental assistance before suspension. In a timely manner following the imposition of suspension, the Director or designee shall make a good faith effort to inform the student's parent or guardian by telephone of the suspension and the reason such action was taken in a timely manner. The suspension and the reason for the suspension shall be communicated in writing to the parent or guardian within twenty-four (24) hours.

### **Biting Policy in Early Childhood**

We understand that younger children may still be learning to use their words and their bodies when interacting with one another and we support and guide children and families through these experiences. If/when a child bites another child, the Guides encourage the child by providing them with positive language to use instead of biting and help support them through these experiences. If the biting gets in the way of the child's learning and if a child bites consistently then we will ask for a meeting with the family, the Guides, and the Director. At this meeting, we will help support the family and if need be, invite a child specialist to come in and observe the child so that we can best support the child. When children bite or deliberately hurt one another more than two times in a row on the same day, we will ask the parents to support us by coming and taking their child home for that day. In these instances, Guides and the administration will work with families to provide the best learning environments and solutions for these children.

In any serious situation, such as a physical fight between children, the following steps are followed:

- ☐ Check that everyone is safe;
- ☐ Remove those not involved;

- Describe what is happening in a non-judgmental way;
- State the appropriate ground rule;
- Separate the child from the situation as gently as possible;
- Preserve self-dignity; and
- Call the parent to pick up the child.

If the situation cannot be rectified in a timely fashion (especially if the behavior presents a danger to other students or faculty members), our out-of-school suspension or dismissal procedures, consistent with the Parent Contract and the St. Johns County Code of Student Conduct, will apply. The final step is that the student is re-assigned to the appropriate district school.

STA Montessori will also utilize the St. Johns County School Board Code of Conduct to handle discipline matters including bullying and harassment that occur. The complete text of the bullying and harassment policy is set forth in SJCSB School Board Rule 3.21. This can be accessed online. STA Montessori reserves the right to create its own code of conduct in subsequent years if the governing board and school staff feel this is appropriate.

### **Possession of Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs**

The use, possession, delivery, or sale of alcohol, tobacco or other drugs including counterfeit or synthetic drugs, whether on school property or at a school function, will not be tolerated.

**It is unlawful for anyone under the age of 18 to smoke tobacco in, on or within 1,000 feet of a public or private elementary, middle or secondary school between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and midnight. If a student is found to have violated this provision, the parents or guardian and law enforcement will be notified and civil penalties may be imposed. Florida Statute 569.11.**

All use of tobacco products and e-cigarettes in any form are prohibited in school buildings, on school property, or at any school sponsored activity by persons of any age. A student under the age of 18 who commits non-criminal tobacco violations (possessing or using tobacco in any form) and fails to comply with corresponding sanctions is subject to mandatory revocation or suspension of, or delay of eligibility for driver's license.

Tobacco- like nicotine or other smoking devices are addressed under Search and Seizure. Students are prohibited from using, possessing, delivering, selling or being under the influence of alcoholic beverages on school property, on a school bus or school-approved transportation, or at any school-related function or activity.

"Drugs" shall include any unlawful drug, narcotic or controlled substance (including prescription medications), and any substance (including household products) represented to be such a drug, narcotic or controlled substance. Students are prohibited from using, possessing, delivering, receiving, selling, intending to sell, or being under the influence of drugs on school property, on a school bus or school-approved transportation, or at any school-related function or activity. They are likewise prohibited from possession of drug paraphernalia, which includes devices, products and things used or intended to be used for the ingestion of drugs. Students are also prohibited from possessing, using, delivering, receiving, selling, or intending to sell any counterfeit drug which is a substance that (i) is represented to be, (ii) is represented to contain, or (iii) appears to

be (looks like) a narcotic drug, hallucinogenic drug, amphetamine, barbiturate, marijuana, alcoholic beverage, stimulant, depressant, intoxicant or controlled substance of any kind, on school property, on a school bus or school approved transportation, or at any school-related function or activity. A student may be subject to arrest and prosecution. While on school property, school bus, or school-approved transportation, or at any school-related function or activity, students are prohibited from planning, intending or committing any act in furtherance of the possession, use, delivery, receiving, purchase, or sale of drugs, counterfeit drugs or drug paraphernalia.

### **Use of Alcohol and Drugs**

A student who is under the influence of alcohol or drugs on school property, on a school bus or school-approved transportation, or at any school-related function or activity shall be deemed to have used and possessed alcohol or drugs. Evidence of such use of alcohol or drugs includes, but is not limited to a student's admission of use of alcohol or drugs on or off campus; witness statements; a positive Portable Breath Test result indicating use of alcohol, red and/or glassy eyes; drooping eyelids; odor of alcohol or drugs; difficulty communicating, walking or standing; difficulty with other motor skills; or other impaired faculties. Students who violate the District's alcohol and drug policies are subject to the penalties. In addition, the Director may revoke the student's privilege of participating in non-academic school activities including, but not limited to, extracurricular activities, athletics, school trips, and moving-up exercise, and/or the revocation of school privileges. Delivery, receipt, or sale of alcohol or drugs, or intent to deliver, receive or sell alcohol or drugs, is a more serious offense than use and possession of drugs or alcohol and shall result in a more serious penalty.

### **Search and Seizure**

Students, their cubbies, vehicles and other possessions are subject to search upon reasonable suspicion that they may possess drugs, other prohibited substances, objects or Contraband, while on school property or wherever students are under school supervision, such as on field trips, at extracurricular activities, or while being transported by school bus or school-approved transportation. School staff may search students reasonably suspected of being in possession of Contraband or other prohibited items. They may search students' possessions when reasonable suspicion exists that such possessions may conceal or contain Contraband or other prohibited items. Students' possessions subject to search include, but are not limited to, book bags, backpacks, athletic bags, notebooks, purses, coats, jackets, telecommunication devices, computers, devices capable of storing or communicating information, lockers, and vehicles. Students do not have any expectation of privacy in or around vehicles on school property. School personnel are encouraged to seek consent from a student before the search but may proceed without consent if reasonable suspicion is present. Signs are posted on campus.

### **Cell Phones and Wireless Communication Devices**

Students may possess cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at school, however, they must be turned off, stored in the student's backpack or in the classroom

designated location. The device shall not be used during the school day without administrative approval or on school buses to and from school. Failure to comply may result in the device being confiscated. Repeated failure to comply will be considered defiance of school rules. Earbuds shall not be used during the school day without administrative approval. Upon administrative approval, use is limited between classes and during lunch only or as directed by the teacher as part of an instructional resource. As a safety precaution only one earbud shall be utilized when not under direct supervision of the teacher. Failure to comply may result in the item being confiscated. Any disruptive, harassing or other inappropriate use of a cell phone or wireless communications device in violation of this policy or school rules, shall be cause for disciplinary action, including confiscation of the device as Contraband and, in the event of repeated or serious misuse, loss of the privilege to possess such a device on school property or while attending a school function. Inappropriate use includes, but is not limited to: (1) texting, phoning or web browsing during prohibited times; (2) taping conversations, music or other audio at any time; (3) taking photographs or video at any time except; (4) "sexting;" and (5) any activity that could in any manner infringe upon the rights of other individuals, including but not limited to students, teachers and other staff members.

### **Digital Internet Safety Policy**

The following policy guidelines are in place to protect students and visitors:

- Prevent user access over its computer network to, or transmission of, inappropriate material via Internet, electronic mail, or other forms of direct electronic communications
- To the extent practical, technology protection measures (or "Internet filters") are used to block or filter Internet, or other forms of electronic communications, access to inappropriate information.
- Specifically, as required by the Children's Internet Protection Act, blocking shall be applied to visual depictions of material deemed obscene or child pornography, or to any material deemed harmful to minors.
- Subject to staff supervision, technology protection measures may be disabled for adults or, in the case of minors, minimized only for bona fide research or other lawful purposes.
- Prevent unauthorized access and other unlawful online activity
- To the extent practical, steps shall be taken to promote the safety and security of users of the online computer network when using electronic mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, and other forms of direct electronic communications.
- Specifically, as required by the Children's Internet Protection Act, prevention of inappropriate network usage includes: (a) unauthorized access, including so-called 'hacking,' and other unlawful activities; and (b) unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal identification information regarding minors
- Prevent unauthorized online disclosure, use, or dissemination of personal identification information of minors
- Provide student education, supervision and monitoring
- School staff will educate, supervise and monitor appropriate usage of the online computer network and access to the Internet in accordance with this policy, the Children's Internet

Protection Act, the Neighborhood Children’s Internet Protection Act, and the Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act.

- Schools will provide age-appropriate training for students who use the Internet facilities committed to the standards and acceptable use of Internet services, including safety on the Internet, appropriate behavior while online, on social networking web sites, and in chat rooms. TikTok is prohibited.

### **Bullying and Harassment Hazing**

Students and employees should be provided a safe and secure learning and work environment, free from bullying, harassment, and cyber-bullying of any kind. The complete text of the District School Board’s bullying and harassment policy is set forth in School Board Rule 3.21. Bullying and harassment are Level III violations of the Code of Conduct and are major infractions. Bullying or harassment will not be tolerated and disciplinary action will be taken. In addition to school consequences, criminal charges may be filed. This policy shall be interpreted and applied consistently with all applicable state and federal laws. Conduct that constitutes bullying or harassment, as defined herein, is prohibited in all educational environments.

Hazing will not be tolerated and disciplinary action will be taken when hazing occurs in connection with athletics, clubs, extracurricular activities or any other educational environment. The complete text of the School Board’s Hazing Policy is set forth in School Board Rule 5.27. This policy shall be interpreted and applied consistently with all applicable state and federal laws. Hazing is a Level III violation of the Student Code of Conduct and is a major infraction.

### **Weapons Prohibited**

In addition to those penalties provided for Level IV offenses, any student who is determined to have brought a firearm (as defined in Chapter 790, Florida Statutes), to school, any school function, or on any school-sponsored transportation will be expelled, with or without continuing educational services, from the student's regular school for a period of not less than one full year and referred for criminal prosecution. It is a third degree felony for a person to exhibit, in a rude and threatening manner, any firearm or destructive device, or other weapon within 1000 feet of school during school hours or during the time of a sanctioned school activity. Toy pistols, more than two inches in length, water guns, or facsimile guns are prohibited from school property, transportation and activities. However, pursuant to Florida Statute 1006.07(2)(g), simulating a firearm or weapon while playing or wearing clothing or accessories that depict a firearm or weapon or express an opinion regarding a right guaranteed by the Second Amendment to the US Constitution is not grounds for disciplinary action or referral to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system under Florida Statutes.

“Simulating a firearm or weapon while playing” includes, but is not limited to:

- A. Brandishing a partially consumed pastry or other food item to simulate a firearm/weapon.
- B. Possessing a toy firearm or weapon that is 2 inches or less in overall length.

- C. Possessing a toy firearm or weapon made of plastic snap-together building blocks.
- D. Using a finger or hand to simulate a firearm or weapon.
- E. Vocalizing an imaginary firearm or weapon.
- F. Drawing a picture, or possessing an image, of a firearm/weapon.
- G. Using a pencil, pen, or other writing or drawing utensil to simulate a firearm/weapon.

However, a student may be subject to disciplinary action if simulating a firearm or weapon while playing substantially disrupts student learning, causes bodily harm to another person, or places another person in reasonable fear of bodily harm. The severity of consequences imposed upon a student, including referral to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system, must be proportionate to the severity of the infraction and consistent with District School Board policies for similar infractions. If a student is disciplined for such conduct, the school Director or Assistant Director must call the student's parents.

Any student who is determined to have brought a firearm or weapon, as defined in Chapter 790, Florida Statutes, to school, shall be recommended for expulsion, with or without continual educational services, from the student's regular school for a period of not less than one full year and referred to the criminal justice or juvenile justice system. The SJCSB Board may assign the student to a disciplinary program or second chance school for the purpose of continuing educational services during a period of expulsion.

### **Youth Mental Health First Aid**

All faculty have completed the Youth Mental Health First Aid USA course and have been trained to provide initial help to a young person experiencing a mental health or substance challenge. We have adopted the policy of the SJCSB. If it becomes necessary to Baker Act a student, the school will notify/contact parents immediately.

### **Campus Safety**

#### Background Checks for Visitors and Volunteers

Before access to classrooms during school hours, all visitors are required to undergo a background check. All visitors to campus must comply with all Health and Safety guidelines currently in place. Attendance at a school sponsored, school-wide event requires a sign-in with our Security Resource Officer present. These checks are good for one year only. Forms that are available in the school office must be completed and submitted to the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office. Volunteers are of the utmost character and conduct themselves as positive role models within our school and society. The information you provide on the background check form will not be shared with others and is only used for the intended purpose. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Additional screening and training is required for volunteers who will be working with children. Staff will direct such volunteers through the additional required fingerprinting and clearance procedures.



For the security of all, everyone must immediately sign the Visitor Log upon arrival at 7 Williams Street and wear a name tag badge. Upon leaving, please stop in the office and sign out and return the name tag badge. In this way, we can accurately know who is in the building and contact you should an emergency arise while you are here.

### Safe-School Officer

St Augustine Public Montessori School has one safe-school officer on campus when the facility is open for instruction as defined by its academic calendar. Our safe-school officer may be asked to stay for larger school-sponsored events considering factors such as the number of persons present, the ratio of staff members to students, and other safety measures. We have adopted the policy of the SJCS D.

### **Emergency Drills**

Office personnel will coordinate with the SJCS D School Safety Specialist and document these drills:

- Fire (2 first month, 1/month for the remainder of the school year)
- Bomb Threat/Evacuation (1 per school year)
- Tornado/Inclement Weather (1 per school year)
- AED/Stop the Bleed (1 per school year)
- Active Assailant/Hostile Intruder/Lockdown (4 times per school year)

This charter school has adopted the active assailant response and hostage situation plans of the SJCS D. Completion of emergency drills are sent to the district on a monthly basis. All school personnel are trained annually on the procedures in the district's Active Assailant Response Plan. Completion of this annual training for all school personnel is documented in the FSSAT.

### Emergency Vocabulary:

- Evacuation - Leave the building and gather in a pre-assigned areas on campus
- Relocation - Leave campus for a safer location
- Soft Lockdown - Out of caution, you may still enter/exit campus to collect your child
- Official Lockdown - Authorities directive and no one may enter/exit buildings until cleared

The School's first response will always be to ensure the safety of the students. Once the children are safe, the school will begin the process of contacting parents. Be aware that in the event of an emergency, phones and internet connections may be affected.

### **Other Safety Measures**

#### Florida Safe Schools Assessment Tool (FSSAT)

Each year, the Director (school safety specialist) completes a school security risk assessment on or before October 1 using the FSSAT.



This helps develop policies, upgrades and procedures with the SJCSO School Safety Specialist through gathering information from St Augustine Montessori physical campus.

#### Fortify Florida

St Augustine Montessori has access to Fortify FL and to provide timely information, receive tips and notifications. The School promotes Fortify FL by advertising it on our website, across our campus and in school publications. Fortify FL applications are available on all iPad devices issued to students.

#### Threat Assessment Team

St Augustine Public Montessori School has a threat assessment team who serves proactively to identify needs and provide support to students. The team assesses the behavior of a person who may pose a threat to school staff or students and coordinates intervention and services as needed. All threat assessment team members are trained on the CSTAG model and meet each month at a minimum or as often as needed to fulfill their duties of assessing and intervening. We have included the SJCSO School Safety Specialist on our team and have adopted the policy of the SJCSO.

#### Alyssa's Alert (Centegix)

St Augustine Montessori has chosen the SJCSO's CENTEGIX mobile panic alert system that meets all requirements of Section 1006.07(4), F.S.

#### School Environmental Safety Incident Reporting (SESIR)

St Augustine Montessori has two trained employees, the Director and the Assistant Director in SESIR duties. SESIR reporting procedures follow SJCSO requirements and are made to law enforcement.

## **Student Assessment and Progression**

Our learning environment is supportive and responsive to the individual needs of all students. Each child's strengths and needs will be identified through diagnostic use of the Montessori materials, Guide observation, and other evaluative and diagnostic instruments. Plans for differentiated instruction are developed and delivered for all students. Students are expected to show mastery of the elements of the Montessori curriculum by the end of the three-year cycle. STA Montessori uses a Montessori material tracking system tool that correlates Montessori Curriculum to the Florida State and National Common Core Standards as they are applied to the K-6<sup>th</sup> grades.

Built into many Montessori materials are methods for self-testing, leading to self-correction. The child learns rapidly to assess his own progress and choose a new course if necessary. If a child is having difficulty, Guides will intervene to offer help and guidance, but they are trained to stand back and observe the process if the child is progressing appropriately. Because of the precise sequence of most lessons, a child typically will not move onto the next series of lessons without demonstrating competency in the first. The child and the Guide both know when more practice is required, or if she/he is ready to move onto the next new lesson.

In addition to an enriched academic advancement, it is important to remember that character

education, community service, self-esteem, leadership training, time management, and organizational skills are essential life long skills that are part of our program. A Montessori Guide is a trained observer of the child. Regular, recorded observations of the child's progress form the basis of the child's assessment records. Guides will use an appropriate combination of qualitative and quantitative assessment tools including mastery checklists and narrative reports. Guides will also track growth using portfolios, group discussions, self- and peer-assessments, curriculum-based assessments and bi-weekly meetings between the child and the Guide. The Montessori materials are also diagnostic. Guides observe the children's facility with the materials and their ability to teach that material to another student. These regular observations also inform the plan of instruction for each individual child.

### **Inclusive Classrooms for Students with Learning Differences**

STA Montessori utilizes an inclusion model for ESE students, with Guides using the Montessori Method to identify and address the needs of all students, including those with IEPs within the classroom. In addition to a staff member with ESE certification, our ESE team includes a speech-language pathologist, an occupational therapist and an ESE Support Guide. These experts will work with the Montessori-trained Guides and be cross-trained in Montessori approaches for students with exceptionalities. STA Montessori also makes use of assistance from the District ESE Department as needed to ensure compliance.

Children are accepted to the school without identifying special needs, IEP or other ESE status. All children with suspected or identified special needs will be addressed on an individual basis during the enrollment process. The school's ESE team will review each student's IEP and special services and offer instruction best suited to the needs of the child as recommended. We do not have any separate classrooms or extra assistants dedicated to special needs students. It is our professional responsibility as educators to place students in an environment where they can flourish. Therefore, those students whose special needs cannot be adequately addressed at STA Montessori will be appropriately referred. In consultation with the ESE team to understand the Montessori approach and inclusive classroom model, families may determine that they prefer a different approach or that the student's needs can be better served at another school.

### **Gifted Students**

The Montessori program is inherently suited for gifted learners and Guides are trained to treat each individual student as gifted, whether the parents decide to utilize testing to assess this label. The curriculum is open-ended and presents many opportunities for problem solving and critical thinking. Learning is self-paced, allowing individual students to advance independently. Guides are prepared and well equipped to follow the interests of students in a variety of interconnected directions or as deep or advanced as a student can go. Long uninterrupted blocks of time allow for in-depth study of topics of choice. The School will plan and monitor instructional alternatives for individual students as needed within the regular Montessori classroom using a consultation model with a gifted specialist.

### **Homework**

In the Montessori philosophy, homework is all work that a child does at home. From doing chores to taking a walk, it furthers the child's education by developing language skills, cultural awareness, making math a real part of the home environment, and giving the child a voice in family decisions. Homework should be meaningful; that is, it should be an extension of the child's interests.

No educational system can be successful in preparing the child for a place in society without parental support. Education is a cooperative effort that begins at home and is supplemented by schools. For these reasons, it is expected that parents will take an active part in choosing homework appropriate for the child.

Your child's guide may or may not assign homework. Homework in the lower grades is usually designed as a follow-up on class lessons, a practical application of a concept to try at home, and/or practice so that children can build their academic skills. Homework for children in upper grades also includes long term projects that your child may work on alone or with your assistance. It may also include skills practice and book reports. Be sure your child has a quiet place to read and write at home.

The following is a list of real-life activities that are "homework" for the child and parent:

- Spend time enjoying the outdoors
- Gardening: plant a garden or a flower box
- Letter writing (thank you notes, invitations, etc.)
- Story writing
- Regular library trips
- Reading aloud to your child
- Have your child read aloud to you
- Scan newspaper headlines and discuss news topics with your child
- Draw objects from the home environment/neighborhood
- Experiment with clay, string, etc.
- Count money
- Allow your child to help plan and prepare meals
- Have your child compare newspaper ads and coupons for food prices, etc.
- Have your child write the grocery list
- With guidance, encourage your children to take care of transactions at the bank, grocery store
- Use maps to plan outings with your child and allowing your child to navigate around town
- Take hikes and bike rides with your child
- Visit parks, local museums and galleries, even for a short time
- Work on a family project: Interview grandparents or other family members, make a timeline
- Make a game with a deck of cards to practice math facts
- Play board games
- Make games out of learning new vocabulary or solving problems
- Research a topic of interest
- Keep a journal
- Practice keyboarding on the computer
- Spend time with family and friends

We strongly encourage you to read with your child 20 minutes per night. Let your child hear the sound of your voice as you read to them. Hold them close or put them on your lap. With older children, take turns reading to them and have them read to you. Whatever the subject matter, allow your nightly reading to be for pleasure. We suggest that you do not force children to read to you if they don't want to or are not ready to do so. Let them know you value reading by doing it together every night. Be certain to record the reading time on a reading log.

## **Standardized Testing**

Part of the Federal legislation that authorizes funding for charter schools also requires charter schools to report their academic progress, so the government knows this funding is used appropriately. Therefore, even though Maria Montessori hoped for a day when there would be no formal testing in any schools, STA Montessori must participate in state mandated standardized testing, and Guides will take steps to make sure our students are prepared.

For students in grades K-6, STA Montessori participates in three windows of the Florida Assessment of Student Thinking (FAST) progress monitoring (PM1, PM2, PM3) conducted by our staff. Since our school is required to participate in standardized testing, we treat this as a practical life exercise. It gives children the opportunity to learn how to take a test in an environment where they feel comfortable. Instead of “teaching to the test,” we will immerse the children in hands-on activities to learn the concepts that are addressed in the test and beyond. While we understand this information is important to stakeholders, we feel it is essential to collect data from a variety of sources to truly understand each student as a learner.

## **Progress Reports**

In October, you have the opportunity to conference with your child’s Guide on how your child is normalizing in the classroom. Detailed progress reports are shared twice per year. Guides base these reports on observations of students and student work. Emphasis is not placed on achieving an external standard; instead students work toward understanding of concepts and their own developmental growth. Additionally, each elementary student will create a portfolio collection of his or her best or favorite work to share during a child-led conference.

The Montessori approach is holistic, in that it does not have only a student’s academic achievement as its sole goal, but also a student’s social, emotional and physical growth. It is important then that all aspects of a student’s development are assessed from time to time, so that the child, Guide, and parents can view growth over time and the student’s phases of development.

## **Student Records and Privacy**

STA Montessori stresses the importance of protecting the rights and privacy of children, their families, and our Guides. The practice of maintaining the confidentiality of verbal information and written records is a basic policy of our school. This practice is in accord with ethical principles of professional behavior in school settings and American Montessori Society schools.

According to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), parents have the right to review the complete school records of their children. Parents who wish to review their child's record are requested to make an appointment with the Director to do so. A staff member must be present when records are reviewed. STA Montessori will not send or show student records to anyone outside the school system without first obtaining written permission. We will keep a record of any requests for a student's record, who requested the information, the reason for the request, and whether access to the record was provided. When an STA Montessori student enters or seeks to enter another school or institution in or outside the SJCSD, records will be forwarded to that institution upon request of either the parent or the new school within 5 days.

## Parent Life

Forming a partnership with families is essential to the success of our mission. We will plan several family education opportunities and community events to help families learn about the Montessori method and connect with others within our learning community. Families are expected to attend the Parent Orientation, conferences, family education events, Community Meetings, and volunteer their time in other ways that are convenient for their schedule.

## Parent Education

Participation in parent education is required as part of your Contract of Commitment with the school. Because Montessori programs represent not only educational theory and teaching methods, but an attitude toward the life of the child, it is important for parents to become familiar with this approach. With a shared understanding, teachers and parents can support one another for the greatest benefit of the child. Attendance at all parent education events is encouraged.

At least one parent per family is required to attend:

- Parent Orientation required for all families
- Community Meetings – Minimum required attendance 2 out of 3
- Parent Education Classes – Minimum required attendance 4 out of 10
- Parent Teacher Conferences (scheduled) – Minimum required attendance 2 out of 3. (Fall, Winter, Spring) are scheduled for 20-30 minute blocks of time.

## Community Meetings

Three Community meetings (Fall, Winter, Spring) are scheduled throughout the school year to create community and provide parents the opportunity for questions and community discussion.

## Volunteering and Family Service Hours

Enrollment in St. Augustine Public Montessori School is a cooperative choice. Parents contractually agree to be responsible for their child abiding by the rules and regulations applicable to attendance, classroom participation, and behavior. For students to be automatically re-enrolled for the next school year, families must fulfill the terms of their contract, requiring a minimum of 20 hours of volunteer service per year per family to the School. Service hours may not be converted to monetary donations.

Families must be willing to make an extraordinary commitment to their child's education and our volunteer program encourages greater parent participation, builds a greater sense of community, and taps into our parents' talents. These hours may be fulfilled in many ways such as: helping in the office, cleaning the playground and grounds, cutting papers at home for classroom projects, making materials, working on school improvement projects such as painting, helping with campus beautification workdays, light maintenance, serving on a Board of Trustees committee, going to the library for your child's guide, teaching an enrichment class, or driving for field trips. Each family is responsible for documenting their hours and logging them through email to [volunteer@stamontessori.org](mailto:volunteer@stamontessori.org). During the course of volunteering or working at the School, all information, products, data or materials generated will become the property of STA Montessori. Volunteers, staff and Board members will all execute a Confidentiality Agreement, sign and comply with the school's Conflict of Interest Policy and when applicable, sign a form prior to any activity on behalf of the school.

**Volunteering at School when the students ARE present** - This type requires approval through a background check. If you are considering participating in this manner, you can pick up a form at school or your local sheriff's office. Background screenings must be resubmitted every year. It is important that employees and volunteers who work with your children at school are of the utmost character and conduct themselves as positive role models within our school and society. The information you provide on the background check form will not be shared with others and is only used for the intended purpose. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

**Volunteering when students ARE NOT present** - These hours help the school through clerical work, yard work, gardening, serving on committees, etc.

**Volunteering at home** - Throughout the year help is needed for cutting, folding, sorting, calling, recycling, laundry, etc. Take-home projects are organized by classroom Guides. These tasks can be done from home and still count toward meeting your parental volunteer requirement.

### **Enforceability**

Consistent with F.S. 1002.33(10)(e)5, the Contract of Commitment is enforceable under Florida law, and failure of a parent or legal guardian to uphold or fulfill their responsibilities under said contract would be sufficient grounds for denial of admission to the school the following year. As a public school of choice, St. Augustine Public Montessori School relies on a strong home-to-school connection for the success of its program. Failure on the part of the family to uphold the Contract of Commitment jeopardizes not only the school's overall performance but may affect the child's educational potential as well. Families will be notified in writing of the consequence for nonfulfillment of the Contract of Commitment, which is to return to the student's zoned school or placement on the waitlist to determine enrollment for the coming school year. A parent or legal guardian may request benevolence from the Charter Board of Directors, who will address cases of hardship on a case-by-case basis.

### **Non Discrimination Statement**

STA Montessori is committed to diversity and equality. Accordingly, the school admits students and conducts all educational programs, activities and employment practices without regard to sex, race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation or physical, mental, emotional or learning disability or handicap.

### **Parental Rights in Education House Bill 1557 & Rule 6A-6.0791**

House Bill 1557 protects the rights of parents in need of additional assistance with certain disputes that are not timely resolved by the school district. Rule 6A-6.0791, adopted in October 2022 applies to Charter Schools. The purpose of this rule is to provide information about the process for a parent of a student enrolled at a charter school to request the appointment of a Special Magistrate for disputes involving the student's health, safety, or welfare as described in 1001.42(8)(c), F.S. (2).

St Augustine Public Montessori School has adopted the following procedures in response for compliance:

- The Director will notify a parent if there is a change in the student's services or monitoring

related to the student's mental, emotional or physical health or well-being and the school's ability to provide a safe and supportive learning environment.

- Students will be encouraged to discuss issues relating to their well-being with their parents or to facilitate discussion of the issue with the parent for awareness and involvement. School and district personnel may not discourage or prohibit parental notification or involvement in critical decisions affecting a student's mental, emotional or physical health or well-being.

If a parent is concerned that school personnel have not complied with requirements, the parent will notify the Director of their concerns. Notice may be by email, hand delivery or US mail and shall explain the nature of the concern, the identified requirements and the state resolution requested.

- The Director will forward a copy of the notice to the district's Associate Superintendent for Student Support Services.
- The Director will assemble a grievance committee of faculty to fully examine the complaint. The Director and grievance committee will meet with the parent to allow the parent an opportunity to explain the concern in detail and furnish any supporting documentation. The parent will be notified of the school's response within 7 calendar days.
- If the complaint cannot be resolved by the charter school, then STA Montessori will fully cooperate in the school district's resolution procedures and comply with the district's decision for resolution of the complaint. The parent shall notify the district's Senior Director for School Services with the concern.
- Appropriate district staff will continue to investigate and attempt to resolve the concern. If the concern remains unresolved after 30 days following the notification, the district must provide the parent with a statement of reasons for no resolution and the parent has the right to submit a form to the FDOE requesting the appointment of a Special Magistrate. If the request is granted, a Special Magistrate will hold a hearing and provide a recommended decision to the State BOE on the dispute between a parent and school district.
- All costs a district incurs for reviewing and responding to a complaint lodged by a parent enrolled in a charter school under this rule is a service provided by the school district to the charter school. Contracts providing for payment of such services are limited to the district's actual cost unless mutually agreed to by the school district and the charter.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM**

Please sign and date this acknowledgement form and return to the school office:

**St. Augustine Public Montessori School**



**7 Williams Street  
St. Augustine, FL 32084  
(904) 342-5350  
[www.stamontessori.org](http://www.stamontessori.org)**

I acknowledge that I have read, understand, and agree to abide by the information given in the St. Augustine Public Montessori School Community Handbook. I understand that the content may change or be updated by STA Montessori.

**Parent Signature:**

**Date:**

**Parent Signature:**

**Date:**