



Family Handbook 2026-2027

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WELCOME

Welcome to the School year 2026-2027 at Fort Collins Montessori School. We are delighted you have chosen FCMS as an educational home for your child and, as this *Handbook* explains, just as pleased to be serving your entire family through an authentic, public Montessori option in Fort Collins.

Our Montessori environments represent a local milestone as Fort Collins's first public Montessori program. We are thrilled to partner with Fort Collins Public Schools (Poudre School District) in order to serve more families and to work toward the development of a local model of exemplary Montessori education in the public sector.

This handbook is a further effort to help us work together in the interest of children and families. It opens with the *Partnership Agreement*. We hope you will take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with that document. It responds to two questions: "What is it that you can expect of FCMS?" and "What will FCMS expect of you?" Our goal in leading with this document is to communicate as clearly as possible what we can expect of each other, and to eliminate the frustration and disappointment that result when unstated expectations go unmet.

This *Parent Handbook* is a part of our effort. We invite you to familiarize yourself with its contents and to use it as a reference tool. If you do have questions, please ask. If you have suggestions, we welcome them.

We welcome you and your children to a year of discovery and growth.

Sincerely,

Paul Vincent
Head of School
Fort Collins Montessori School
pvincent@focomontessori.org

FORT COLLINS MONTESSORI SCHOOL THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Fort Collins Montessori School is a family-centered learning community: we take seriously our commitment to serve not only children enrolled in the School, but the entire family. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations. Choosing to attend Fort Collins Montessori School means agreeing to a set of expectations related to the School's mission, operating principles, and policies. Our mission statement is immediately below. Additionally, some of the principles and policies we refer to here are described in this Partnership Agreement.

Fort Collins Montessori School Mission: The mission of Fort Collins Montessori School is to provide a high quality, classic p/K-6 Montessori school that will inspire and empower children to develop fully their academic and personal potential through the implementation of the methods and philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori.

Q. What is the School's most basic expectation of parents?

A. We expect you to make continuing efforts to both understand and embrace the Montessori approach and to work in partnership with the School.

We believe our most constructive relationship building will begin with families prior to admission. Fort Collins Montessori School expects parents to understand and embrace the mission of the school. To that end, we help parents learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for parent education as part of the admission process—so that parents can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children—and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family's years at the School. Once children are enrolled, the School expects parents to attend regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences and parent education events, and to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies, and procedures contained in the Fort Collins Montessori School Parent Handbook and other School publications.

Q. What contribution can I make to create a positive School community?

A. You can demonstrate respect for all adults and children, the School, and the School's programs.

Be a role model for your children. Show respect for them, their classmates, parents of classmates, teachers and other School staff—in short, for everyone associated with the School. Respect begins with civility and deepens into trust. Our most fundamental behavioral guidelines for the children are "Respect yourself, respect others, and respect the environment." We expect the same from adults, parents, and School staff, at all times and in all relationships within the School community. This includes speech and outward behavior. Support your child by speaking of her/his teachers, classmates, and School in positive terms. Respect and abide by the School's policies and procedures. Honor your

commitments. Look for ways to make a positive contribution to the life of the School.

Through your behavior you contribute to your children's moral development and to the culture and climate of their School, which they experience on a daily basis.

Q. How can I create consistency between home and School?

A. You can strive to parent according to Montessori principles.

Learn as much as you can about Montessori principles as they apply to preparation of your child's home environment, as well as the way you, as a parent, interact with your children. This begins with the general principle: "Never do something for your child that s/he is ready to do for her/himself." Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that a child can do for him or herself at each stage of development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which you were parented.

Children develop a love of learning and become responsible, independent, and capable when parents' values and expectations are consistent with those of the School.

Q. What are my responsibilities regarding communication between home and School?

A. We expect you to maintain an active, direct, and respectful two-way communication with the School.

Read communications that are sent home: these may include letters, newsletters and calendars. Inform the School in a timely fashion of pertinent changes in your child's life. Active communication involves parents sharing observations and concerns about their child with the child's current teacher. In matters large and small, remember the principle of respect: even when there is disagreement, disagree respectfully.

Q. What can I expect of the School academically?

A. Fort Collins Montessori School aspires to fulfill its mission as a Montessori school.

As a Montessori school, we are different from traditional schools. Our first commitment is to the multi-dimensional development of your child. Montessori children do amass a great deal of factual knowledge in school. However, our goal is for each child to be far more than a repository of this information: we guide each child to think for him/herself. Cognitive development and a solid academic foundation are essential elements at our school, with the academic foundation being standards based. This said, cognitive development and a solid academic foundation represent but two of several dimensions of our aspirations for your child; equally significant is your child's social, emotional, and

physical development.

At FCMS, children will be given choices and a great deal of freedom—within limits—during the school day. The choices a child makes, and the accompanying responsibilities, influence the emerging character of your child. By choosing his/her own work or shaping it to a considerable degree and following that work through to completion while working independently or in cooperation with others, a child at FCMS will identify her/his interests and develop his/her individual gifts.

Significant emphasis is placed upon community service. Younger children learn by serving their small community, e.g., classmates, classroom, and family. As they grow, children reach out to the larger community and experience the many rewards of helping others. The children gain awareness and appreciation of others, of the challenges faced by others and, equally important, of their own strengths and abilities to help others and affect the world around them. Community service is an integral and important part of their lives and stays with them well beyond their Fort Collins Montessori School years.

We will treat each child with dignity and respect and expect that s/he will treat all others in the same manner. We will treat each child as an individual and strive to develop each child's unique gifts—within the context of the classroom and the community. With freedom comes responsibility, and each child will learn to balance his/her personal freedom with a clear sense of responsibility to him/herself, to others, and to the community as a whole.

Q. What can I expect in terms of communication from the School?

A. We aim to maintain open, honest, timely, and respectful communication with you about your child and about information affecting the community.

There are two regularly scheduled parent-teacher (or in the case of older students, parent-teacher-student) conferences each year, accompanied by written summaries, as well as a year-end written progress report. In the event of special concerns, your child's teacher will contact you to discuss these concerns by phone, by email, or in person. In addition to conference reporting, classroom teachers will communicate with you via classroom letters and newsletters, email messages, and short reports as needed for individual children.

Each FCMS teacher will be a well-trained professional, and his or her evaluation is confidential and based on direct observation of your child. Teachers will always offer their current best understanding of your child's progress and his/her strengths and needs. For all children, this evaluation is based on the teacher's observation, which may be augmented by input from the Head of School and/or auxiliary staff. In addition to work sampling and observation, Fort Collins Montessori School adheres to Poudre School District and Colorado State expectations related to assessment and standardized testing. We will report the results of these assessments annually.

Regarding ongoing School-wide communication and parent involvement, Fort Collins Montessori School distributes a newsletter, and will provide a Parent Handbook, Calendar, and other occasional letters and publications. As to basic parent involvement at the school, we will expect you to attend Montessori educational events and open house opportunities at our school (twice a semester). Additionally, there will be a parent nominated and Board-elected position on our School's Board, having a one-year term. We will canvas the parents in order to learn of their skills, interests, and desire to volunteer in various activities that support the School; parents will not be asked to assist with day-to-day classroom instruction.

Q. What can I expect of the environment?

A. We strive to ensure an environment that is physically and emotionally safe and supportive as well as aesthetically beautiful.

Dr. Montessori said that the classroom teacher's first responsibility is to prepare the environment. The learning materials should correspond to the developmental characteristics of the child at each level, and those materials must be attractive to the child: correct in size, aesthetically pleasing, well maintained, and complete. More broadly, the whole environment must appeal to the child and inspire his/her work.

Our community of children and adults comprises a social environment and culture that impacts your child's experience. We will strive to make this environment emotionally supportive and safe for every child. This does not mean that there will be no problems. It does mean that we will work with your child in developmentally appropriate ways to deal with problems as they arise, empowering him/her with social skills and aiding him/her in the development of emotional intelligence to prepare for a lifetime of working with others in different communities and organizations.

Q. What professional standards can I expect of the School and faculty?

A. Fort Collins Montessori School aspires to maintain the highest pedagogical standards of Montessori practice.

At a minimum, all lead teachers will hold a bachelor's degree; a number have earned master's degrees as well. In addition, Primary, and Elementary teachers will have a post-graduate diploma from an accredited Montessori teacher training center and will be or will become "Highly Qualified" according to the guidelines of the No Child Left Behind Legislation and the Colorado Charter School Grants Program. Our teachers will have a sense of mission in working with children and demonstrate high standards for themselves and their students.

The School promotes a culture of professional growth in a number of ways. Teachers will work annually with the Head of School to create a Professional Growth Plan driven by goal-setting for professional development. Over a three-year cycle, Montessori school consultants will observe each teacher and work with the School as a whole to maintain

the highest standards of Montessori pedagogy. In addition, the School annually will host workshops for professional development of faculty, administration, and board.

Q. What can I expect of the School administration?

A. Integrity: a focus on the needs of the individual child in harmony with the life of the community; mission-driven decisions embodying good stewardship and responsible management; and an open door to your questions or concerns.

Administrative team members interface with all the various constituencies of the School: students, parents, extended family, faculty, alumni, prospective parents, professional visitors, government officials, other schools and educational organizations, and the general public. In your interactions with the administration, you can expect professional, courteous, and business-like conduct, as well as mutually respectful communication.

The Head of School will work closely with the Board of Fort Collins Montessori School and leadership within the Poudre School District. Our Head of School may often face decisions requiring a balance of competing priorities. Sometimes those factors are mutually exclusive; sometimes equally well-intentioned adults see matters differently. In making decisions, our administration will focus on the interest of the individual child in balance with the needs of the School.

MONTESSORI AND FCMS

Social Reform in Action

In the early 1900's, Dr. Maria Montessori, one of Italy's first woman physicians, was invited to develop a child-care program as part of an urban renewal project in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. The program, located on the first floor of a low-income housing project, came to be known as the *Casa dei Bambini* or "Children's House." Within months, news of the success of the *Casa* spread, first throughout Italy and later across the globe.

Over the next fifty years, her "experiment," as she called it, evolved into a carefully organized, evidence-based approach to providing children, at all developmental levels, the opportunity to construct themselves. Based on on-going observation of children, Dr. Montessori concluded that learning should be active, driven by interest, and occur in mixed-age classrooms where children at various stages of development can learn from and with one another. Her advice was always to "follow the child."

From the beginning, however, Dr. Montessori's revolutionary vision of optimal education was deeply linked to an equally powerful vision of social reform driven by the potential inherent in children. By following the child, by attending to his needs, respecting her interests, and guiding (not dictating) growth, we come to see the possibilities of a better world.

It is this spirit of hope and possibility that animates the work of FCMS, and is exemplified in our integration of children's and family development.

The Method

The Montessori Method is built on the conviction that children are intelligent, active, and purposeful beings who are deeply invested in their own formation. It is distinguished by three interconnected characteristics. The adults' roles, the environment, and a caring ethic.

The main task of the guide is to foster the child's development rather than transmit knowledge. Montessori educators are specially trained to observe children. They use these skills to monitor student progress, diagnose needed interventions and plan future work. The classroom is a rich, specially prepared and developmentally appropriate environment that invites the child to active, purposeful engagement with learning.

Finally, an abiding ethic of care flows from the first two. Within the prepared environment, children develop at their own pace and adults guide that development with quiet respect for the needs of the children and their emerging capacities as learners.

The method is a response to a universal plea among children: "I want to learn, but help me to do it myself." Through carefully orchestrated experiences guided by physical and mental order, children acquire the inner discipline necessary to persist at their chosen tasks, to interact with the world respectfully, and to participate confidently in an increasingly complex world.

To learn more about Montessori education, we suggest the following:

Books by Maria Montessori

Most books available by Dr. Montessori are actually transcribed lectures from her many training courses. Two, *The Montessori Method* and *Dr. Montessori's own Handbook*, were prepared especially for readers interested in learning about her new pedagogical approach. Most titles are widely available through commercial booksellers; others can be obtained through the North American Montessori Teachers Association.

- *The Absorbent Mind*
- *The Secret of Childhood*
- *The Discovery of the Child*
- *Education and Peace*
- *Education for a New World*
- *To Educate the Human Potential*
- *From Childhood to Adolescence*

Books Related to the Montessori Experience

- Michael Duffy, *Math Works: Montessori Math and the Developing Brain*
- David Kahn (Ed.) *Montessori Talks to Parents*
- Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*
- Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori Today: A Comprehensive Approach to Education from Birth to Adulthood*
- Lynn Jessen and Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori from the Start: The Child at Home from Birth to Age Three*
- Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*
- Aline Wolf, *Peaceful Children, Peaceful World: The Challenge of Maria*

Montessori Recommended Books on Childrearing and Family Life

- Robert Evans, *Family Matters: How Schools Can Cope With the Crisis in Childrearing*
- Faber, Adele, and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk; Siblings without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too*
- Jane Healy, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect our Children's Minds – And What We Can Do About it*
- Mogel, Wendy, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self Reliant Children*
- Jane Nelson, *Positive Discipline: The Classic Guide to Helping Children Develop Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation, and Problem Solving Skills*
- Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at any Level*

Books in Spanish

- *La Mente Absorbente (The Absorbent Mind)**El niño: secreto de la infancia (The Secret of Childhood)*
- *Formación del Hombre (The Formation of Man)*
- *La Educación de las Potenciales (To Educate the Human Potential)* by Maria Montessori
- *Un Ser Humano: La importancia de los primeros tres años de vida* by Silvana Montanaro (*Understanding the Human Being*)
- *La Educación Para el Desarrollo Humano* by Maria Montessori (*Education for Human Development*)
- *Cómo Cultivar el Espíritu del Niño en un Ambiente Laico* by Aline Wolf (*Nurturing the Spirit in Non-Sectarian Classrooms*)
- *Una guía para padres al aula Montessori* by Aline Wolf (*A Parent's Guide to the Montessori Classroom*)

For these books or for assistance in locating other books in Spanish, contact:
Rittchell Yau, Consejo Interamericano Montessori 1203 Pacific Drive, Davis, CA 95616
530-758-6340; cite@pacbell.net.

Useful Catalogs

The Michael Olaf Montessori Company publishes beautiful and informative catalogs containing Montessori-compatible books, toys, clothing, and other materials.

- *The Joyful Child, for Birth to Three*
- *Child of the World, for Age 3-12 +*

Useful Websites

- www.montessori-ami.org
- www.montessoriconnections.com
- www.montessori.namta.org
- www.public-montessori.org
- www.michaelolaf.net

GENERAL INFORMATION

Mission

The mission of Fort Collins Montessori School is to provide a classic pre/K-6th grade Montessori program that inspires and empowers children with an exceptional educational experience based on the principles and philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori.

Vision

We envision a classic Montessori school providing an individualized educational program that recognizes the development of children and supports the natural intelligence and potential within each child. Children will work in a prepared learning environment where they will flourish as enthusiastic and responsive learners, and as innovative and collaborative problem solvers. Our school will create and maintain an atmosphere in which children are intrinsically motivated, joyful, responsible, committed life-long learners who exhibit an undeniable personal strength in their knowledge of self at each stage of their growth and development.

Core Values

In order to accomplish our mission to inspire and empower children to develop fully their potential through Montessori education, we commit to:

- Challenging each child to do and be his or her best
- Respecting the individual child and one another
- Understanding children, their development, and education
- Providing support for the individual and community within the school
- Demonstrating respect for all living things
- Supporting self-care through well-being and healthy nutrition at school
- Living and working in peace
- Engaging in stewardship and care of the natural world
- Being socially responsible, inclusive, and compassionate
- Raising community consciousness and understanding of local and global concerns
- Developing a team of educated, prepared and effective teachers

Maria Montessori's integrated vision of social reform, fueled by service to the child, animates all aspects of our program. From our intensive approach to engaging families, to the beautiful, developmentally appropriate environment that we will create and maintain for all members of the community, we view education as an "aid to life" for learners of every age.

Guided by this optimistic vision of social progress, we believe that the purpose of education is to realize human potential, which enables transformative outcomes for individuals, families, and communities. That vision will be made visible in graduates who demonstrate superior capacities for creativity, adaptability, leadership, and compassion.

Leadership and Governance

FCMS's charter, mission, and bylaws are administered by its Governing Board. The

Board has final authority for the policy and operational decisions of the school in accordance with its Charter and the Charter School Law. The Board's structure is designed to focus its energies on **governance** including developing and implementing **policies**, supervision of the academic and non-academic operations of the school, **compliance** with fiduciary and legal requirements and financial oversight. The Board will hire, supervise, and evaluate the Head of School, and will delegate **management** of the school to the Head of School, and through him or her to the professional staff of the school.

The Montessori model recognizes the importance of teamwork and the value of heterogeneous groupings. This belief will be reflected throughout the school, whether in classrooms or offices. The leadership team will report to the Head of School. The team will meet regularly to assess the school's progress in meeting its mission, vision, and strategic goals. Further, they engage in short- and long- term planning and recommend school-wide decisions accordingly.

What Is a Charter School?

From the Colorado League of Charter Schools website:

Charter schools are tuition-free, public schools that have the flexibility to be innovative, entrepreneurial, self-governing, and are held accountable for student and operational performance.

Charter schools are independent public schools with rigorous curriculum programs. Each charter school is different, thus offering parents a variety of choices so they can select the school that best fits their child's unique learning style.

In exchange for operational freedom and flexibility, charter schools are subject to high levels of accountability. Charter schools, which are tuition-free and open to all students, offer quality and choice in the public education system.

The "charter" establishing each such school is a contract detailing the school's mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment, and ways to measure success. The "charter" contract is between the charter school and the entity granting the charter ("the authorizer"). In Colorado, the authorizer is generally the local school district, but in some cases it is the state via the Colorado Charter School Institute.

In Colorado, charters are granted for a period of time, generally five years. At the end of the term, the authorizer may renew the school's contract. Charter schools are accountable to their authorizer, as well as to the students and families they serve, to produce positive academic results and adhere to the charter contract. Charter schools must also follow state and federal public school laws.

Like traditional public schools, charters receive state funding based on a formula for each child enrolled in the school. This funding is called "Per-Pupil Operating Revenue," or "PPR".

School districts finance their facilities using property tax, mill levies, and taxpayer-backed bonds. Charter schools generally do not receive a proportionate share of these monies. As a result, money often comes out of the classroom to pay for buildings.

On average, charter schools in Colorado spend \$606 per student from designated per-pupil operating revenue on facilities costs.

Fort Collins Montessori School has a charter contract with Poudre School District. PSD is our authorizer and we are accountable to them. With that in mind, if you have any questions or would like to review our charter application, please contact our Board President.

Enrollment

Currently enrolled students have priority for enrollment in Fort Collins Montessori School for the following school year. Beginning in January, parents, guardians or legal custodians of students currently attending FCMS must declare their intentions to return to the school in the next academic school year. The Fort Collins Montessori School website will post a reminder to parents/legal guardians of the need to return re-enrollment forms, copies of the re-enrollment forms, and the final day the forms will be accepted. It will be the parent/legal guardian's responsibility to return the re-enroll form by the date determined and communicated to families. On the first business day of February, the Head of School will determine the number of spaces available for new students in each grade level for the upcoming school year. If there are more applicants for positions than spots available, the Head of School will conduct a lottery. The details of our lottery system are available for review upon request via phone/email or by visiting the school office.

Applicants for the preschool positions at Fort Collins Montessori School must be at least 3 years old as of October 1st of the upcoming school year. Children up to six years of age as of October 1st of the upcoming school year may also enroll in the Primary Program. It is strongly encouraged for children in the Primary Program to be fully potty trained with the ability to go to and from the restroom independently.

Fee Schedule

Click here for [Tuition & Fees](#) posted on our school website.

Withdrawal

When Preschool or Other tuition based service is withdrawn by FCMS, we will give a one month written notice, unless circumstances for this withdrawal involves disciplinary

action.

Parents or guardians are asked to give a 30 day written notice if withdrawing their student from FCMS, and a two week written notice if withdrawing from Before & After School Care. **For any period of notice not given, pre-paid tuition will not be refunded.**

Parents: A Vital Partnership

Being a parent at Fort Collins Montessori assumes both a major investment and a major commitment. A Montessori education extends well beyond the basics of literacy and numeracy into the social and spiritual aspects of life. This applies to parents as well as children. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations.

We build our most productive relationships with parents who understand and embrace the mission of the school. To that end, we help parents learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for parent education as part of the admission process—so that parents can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children—and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family’s years at the school. Once children are enrolled, FCMS expects parents to attend regularly scheduled parent-guide conferences and parent education events, and to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies and procedures contained in this *Handbook* and other school publications.

Parents often ask for help in creating consistency between home and School, and much of our communication with you is aimed toward supporting this goal. This begins with the general principle: “Never do something for your child that he can do for himself.” Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that a child can do for himself at each stage of development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which we were parented. In general, Montessori teaching relies on “showing” rather than “correcting.”

We understand that the School/Home partnership so vital to successful Montessori education begins with honest, open inquiry and deepens into trust. We invite you to let us know your thoughts, questions, and concerns, as we are committed to working together to serve the child.

Communication

At FCMS we strive to foster clear and robust communication between home and school. The chart below offers guidance regarding the proper channels to use for gaining information and solving problems.

<i>Matter Pertains to....</i>	<i>Who to contact.....</i>
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Child's progress, Classroom activities, Class procedures, Elementary Assistants, Behavior and discipline	Guide
Pedagogical issues, Academic policy, Admissions, Parent education Facilities, Legal matters Fundraising, Public relations	Head of School
Before /After School Issues, Primary Assistants, Primary Program or Schedule Billing/accounts, Changes in tuition	Director of Childcare
Daily scheduling, Student records, Observations, Registration, Tours Parent Volunteering	Head of School

In addition to the above guidelines for channeling the flow of communication, we call your attention to the following elements of our program designed to enhance the school-home relationship:

Classroom Observation

There is no better way to gain an understanding of your child's experience here at School than by observing in the classroom. Knowing what is going on in the classroom provides a common point-of-reference for you and your child to talk about his or her "work" at school. It also enhances communication with guides. Beginning in October, our programs are open to anyone interested in observing the Montessori environment. In order to preserve the quiet atmosphere of the classroom, we limit visitors to one per day. Please schedule your observation time with your guide.

Conferences

You may schedule a conference with your child's guide at any time by contacting them through email, or phone call.

For Primary and elementary children, conferences are formally scheduled two times a year, in the late fall and early spring. School is closed to accommodate these events and parents arrange individual appointments through the guide's scheduling program or

email.

Progress Reports

All students receive formal progress reports twice yearly. You will notice that these documents are notable for the level of detail they provide; they will tell you not only **how** your child is doing, but also **what** your child is doing. Normally, Progress Reports are distributed at the end of each semester, and we hope you will use these reports to prepare for any subsequent meetings you may have with your child's guide. Like classroom observation, they provide a concrete point-of-reference for discussing the nature of your child's work at School.

Parent Education Night

All of our programs offer parent education nights regularly. These gatherings are usually organized around a Montessori-related topic. They are opportunities to share information about making the most of a Montessori education. These events will be advertised as we develop them; we encourage you to join us.

Notes, Reminders, Updates and Newsletter

The Head of School will distribute news, updates, and reminders each Monday via email (FCMS News). Teachers will send out updates (First Fridays Classroom Updates) once per month via email. To ensure you receive these emails, please add office@focomontessori.org to your email contacts list.

Website

The FCMS website contains the most up-to-date information about the experience of FCMS, our values, our mission and vision, and it includes a Google calendar, and a blog that is updated with FCMS news and articles of interest.

Telephone and E-mail

The office is open for calls from 7:30am to 4:00 pm each day. The office telephone number is 970-631-8612. You may email us at office@focomontessori.org. Guides are not available for calls during School hours, but they will return calls as soon as possible after the school day has finished or within 24 business hours. FCMS relies regularly on e-mail as a tool for sharing important information about goings-on at school.

Visitors

All visitors are required to sign in with the Raptor Visitor Management System. Each visitor must show a valid form of identification and wear a visitor badge while on campus.

General Expectations

Fort Collins Montessori School is a peaceful community of families, students, and guides. As such, we hold ourselves to high standards of civility and expect all community members to treat one another with respect and compassion. As adults in the community, we aspire at all times to model grace, courtesy and a deep respect for our community. These values are visible in small and large ways: from cheerful morning greetings and

handshakes to the care with which physical spaces are maintained to the manner in which older students assume responsibility for themselves and leadership for their younger peers.

Discipline

Fort Collins Montessori School Code of Conduct

Fort Collins Montessori School's goal is to help each student attain the independence and self-confidence needed to become self-disciplined. In so doing, the school will provide a community with structure and order that aids students in the development of self-discipline. Behavior is based on cooperation, logical and natural consequences, fairness, consistency and the belief that all people have the ability to look at themselves honestly, and to change and grow. Fort Collins Montessori School's common goal is the creation of a supportive educational environment where an enthusiasm for learning is fostered. There are certain rights, responsibilities, and consequences that contribute to that environment.

Philosophy and Understanding

Behavior at Fort Collins Montessori School is based on a positive attitude toward children, awareness of the developmental psychology of children, and the unique ability to view and address each child's needs as an individual. Students are taught that Fort Collins Montessori School is a peaceful school based upon mutual respect and care for the community. Teachers model appropriate behaviors, and teach students problem-solving skills and conflict resolution strategies. The goal is to help children arrive at inner discipline through concentrated work, and the child is assisted in developing the skills necessary to control his/her own actions to develop self-discipline. Natural and/or logical consequences are used as a means of helping the child to develop inner limits. Teachers explain the reasons for limits or rules to be sure children understand the need for them, and strive to create an environment to promote learning, where children feel safe and secure.

Peace Curriculum

Peaceful resolution is inherent within the Montessori pedagogy and philosophy through the Peace Curriculum, the goal of which is to teach students to be skilled peacemakers. Students are taught that their behavior and interactions with others will demonstrate compassion, affirmation of others, active listening, respectfulness and peaceful conflict resolution.

Fort Collins Montessori School encourages students to show respect for differences. This is done while fostering a school environment free from all forms of bullying and intimidation whether physical, social, emotional or verbal. The school's focus, based on Montessori Pedagogy, is on preventative measures for such behaviors, by teaching children how to:

- Be caring and courteous

- Cooperate with others
- Deal with angry feelings
- Stand up for themselves without being aggressive
- Respect and celebrate the unique qualities of every person
- Make appropriate behavioral and academic choices

Fort Collins Montessori School will take a progressive educational approach for a safe and peaceful learning environment. Starting at the earliest ages and whenever a student first enters the school, FCMS will provide the skills necessary not only to learn basic safety rules but to interact with classmates, teachers, families and the larger school community in positive and constructive ways. The intention of this education is to foster the development of inner discipline in the child.

Inner discipline consists of four components:

1. Distinct knowledge of safety rules
2. Clear awareness of personal responsibility
3. Respectful attitude towards the members of the school community and the larger global learning environment
4. An understanding and preparedness of the proper way of acting under different circumstances in different places.

Teachers at all age levels will provide lessons in suitable class, school, and community behaviors through direct instruction, modeling and reminders. Teachers will support children in solving difficulties amongst themselves. Clear guidelines, based on three major propositions, are communicated in each room:

- Respect for self
- Respect for others
- Respect for environment

Staff at Fort Collins Montessori School will model appropriate behavior to further provide examples of how people act in social settings. Older children will also model proper behaviors for the younger children, providing even more examples of appropriate behaviors.

Because of the open and respectful nature of this approach, students will understand that mutual respect, care and consideration for others and an empathetic interest in the environment are important in school and all other places. Any issues that arise will be handled individually (or by group) with that person first. Out of respect for each child, these conversations will be done privately. Fort Collins Montessori School will not use parents or family as a threat, but rather as partners in this growth process. Fort Collins Montessori School will strongly encourage families to support this method and support their child in his/her total growth, not just in being “good for the teacher”. Fort Collins Montessori School will care very much about each child and will encourage this partnership to be useful with continuous dialogue. On minor incidents, it will not be

uncommon for staff members to request that a student talk to his/her family about a decision or action so that they can brainstorm other ways to handle a situation.

The staff of Fort Collins Montessori School will have the responsibility to:

1. Work with the children to develop reasonable classroom ground rules consistent with the mission and beliefs of the school.
2. Post ground rules in each classroom and keep them on file in the office; make rules clear to all students.
3. Explain through group meetings, modeling and dialogue what the standards for behavior are for both the classroom and the school.
4. Maintain appropriate behavior in the classroom and the school through redirection and dialogue with the student and his/her family.
5. Report and record school discipline problems to the Head of the School and family using a communication form (to be developed).

“Making good choices, even when others are not watching” will be an important standard at Fort Collins Montessori School. The school will strongly suggest that families keep an open dialogue with their children about “making choices” which directly influences moral development. Fort Collins Montessori School students will not get “in trouble” and teachers will not recognize a “bad day” as an excuse for inappropriate behavior. However, teachers will be very empathetic to children’s issues and concerns, and will validate them whenever appropriate. Fort Collins Montessori School will remind and encourage all learners that “only you make your choices” and will initiate problem solving whenever possible.

When situations do arise, each incident will be assessed individually. Fort Collins Montessori School recognizes that all children are different and have different needs. Fort Collins Montessori School will encourage all students to “use their words” when a situation arises. A child may use firm language to redirect an unwanted behavior, walk away or get help. Retaliation will not be an option and the adult supporting the situation will not be concerned with “who started it”. Instead Fort Collins Montessori School will support each child in peaceful conflict resolution and taking responsibility for their actions.

While Fort Collins Montessori School hopes that unwanted behaviors will be uncommon at the school, there may be occasions where children need more formal direction. Therefore, Fort Collins Montessori School will provide consequences based on C.R.S. §22-33-106, “Grounds for suspension, dismissal and denial of admittance,” as outlined in our Charter Application (available in our Office). It is through this handbook that parents receive a copy of both the Montessori approach to discipline (discussed above) and our discipline policy.

Discipline Protocol – Primary and Elementary Programs

Procedure for Redirectable Behaviors (All grade levels):

Inappropriate behaviors that are considered re-directable or “teachable moments” by staff (and do not involve physical contact with another student, but can still develop into disruptive situations for the classroom community) will be addressed as follows:

1. The teacher will start by redirecting the student and helping him/her get engaged in work. The teacher will continue with this step if positive progress is being made. At this step verbal communication with parents is recommended.
2. If the student is not responding positively to redirection by the teacher, the teacher will help the student find a place in the classroom to calm his/her body and observe the rest of the class.
3. If the student is not responding positively to sitting alone in the classroom, the teacher will then walk the child to the office. The child may remain at the office for an appropriate amount of time based on his/her age. Written documentation to parents required at this step.
4. If the student reaches step 3 twice in one day, the child may be excused from school for the remainder of the day. Written documentation to parents required at this step.
5. If step 4 is reached for five consecutive days, the student may be excused from school until a meeting can be held between the lead teacher, the parents and the Head of School. At this time a behavioral action plan will be presented and discussed. Written documentation to parents required at this step.

Pre-K Program:

Hitting, Kicking, Spitting, and other physically invasive offenses:

- 1st Offense in a Day: Student may stand with a teacher or sit by himself/herself. The teacher will discuss appropriate conflict resolution strategies.
- 2nd Offense in a Day: Student may be excused from school for the remainder of the day.

Biting:

- 1st Offense in a Day: Parents of both students may be called.
- 2nd Offense in a Day: Student may be excused from school for the remainder of the day. Written documentation required.

Misuse of Materials:

- 1st Offense in a Day: Teacher will review appropriate use of materials in the classroom with student, and model correct behavior.
- 2nd Offense in a Day: Student will be asked to put the specific material or work away for the day.
- 3rd Offense in a Day: The specific material or work will be closed to the student for a week.
- 4th Offense in a Day: Teacher will lead a discussion with student and parents.

Inappropriate Language, such as swearing, using taunting or bullying language, speaking disrespectfully to others (students and adults):

- 1st Offense in a Day: Student will stand with a teacher or sit by himself/herself. The teacher and student will discuss what was inappropriate. Written documentation required.
- 2nd Offense in a Day: Student may be sent to the office for an appropriate amount of time based on his/her age. Written documentation required.
- 3rd Offense in a Day: Student may be excused from school for the remainder of the day. Written documentation required.

If a maximum number of offenses is reached by a student for three consecutive school days for any of the aggressive behaviors outlined above, the student may be excused from school until a meeting can be held between the teacher, the parents and the Head of School. At this time a behavior action plan will be presented and discussed.

Elementary Program:

Spitting, Hitting, Kicking, Pushing and Bullying:

- 1st Offense in a Day: Appropriate conflict-resolution strategies will be discussed with the student. The student will spend the remainder of the day working at a solo workspace, or a space directly next to a teacher. Written documentation required.
- 2nd Offense in a Day: Student may be excused from school for the remainder of the day. Written documentation required.

Biting:

- 1st Offense in a Day: Appropriate conflict-resolution strategies will be discussed and practiced with the student. Student may be excused from school for the remainder of the day. Parents of both students will be called. Written documentation required.

Inappropriate Language, such as swearing, using taunting or bullying language, speaking disrespectfully to others (students and adults):

- 1st Offense in a Day: Student will stand with a teacher or sit by himself/herself. The teacher and student will discuss what was inappropriate and alternate appropriate behaviors. Written documentation required.
- 2nd Offense in a Day: Student may be sent to the office for an appropriate amount of time based on his/her age. Written documentation required.
- 3rd Offense in a Day: Student may be excused from school for the remainder of the day. Written documentation required.

Intentional Destruction of Materials or Possessions of Others:

- 1st Offense in a Day: Student will stand with a teacher or sit by himself/herself to complete work. The teacher and student will discuss what was inappropriate. Student's family may be responsible for funding the replacement of destroyed materials in the classroom. Written documentation required.
- 2nd Offense in a Day: Student may be excused from school for the remainder of the day. Written documentation required.

If a maximum number of offenses is reached by a student for two consecutive school days for any of the aggressive behaviors outlined above, the student may be excused from school until a meeting can be held between the lead teacher, the parents and the Head of School. At this time a behavioral action plan will be presented and discussed.

Behavior Action Plans:

If a student has a documented history of reaching the maximum number of offenses (for either re-directable or aggressive behaviors) for five consecutive school days it is the responsibility of the teacher to write and implement a behavior action plan to share with parents before the student returns to class. The Head of School must also be present at this meeting. The goal of the behavioral action plan is to observe, explore and document accommodations/modifications in the current classroom environment to help the student be a positive and contributing member of the class. Behavior action plans will be given a four-week period of implementation. During this period of implementation the normal behavioral consequences as outlined above will continue to be followed. If at the conclusion of the four week period the teacher observes positive change being made, s/he may choose to adjust the current behavioral sanction plan and allow for another four week period of implementation. If minimal or no positive change is being observed, the teacher and Head of School will meet with the parents and discuss appropriate alternatives. At this point a referral for a formal hearing of dismissal or suspension may also be considered as outlined in our Charter Application (available in our Office).

OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Overview

Fort Collins Montessori School aims to cultivate every child's own natural desire to learn. Grounded in Maria Montessori's theory of human development, each classroom supports each child's development according to his/her readiness. Each child is free to explore within a specially prepared environment and with the guidance of the Montessori-trained teachers or "guides". Designed to be beautiful, orderly, and calm, each classroom is a community of peaceful, purposeful, and developmentally appropriate activity.

Mixed age classes provide a real-world experience for the developing child, as peers learn from one another and work together to maintain their community. Within an environment that intentionally balances freedom and responsibility, children learn to recognize the needs of others while also developing life-long skills of persistence, critical thinking, and independence.

Each environment is prepared to meet the needs of children moving through successive phases of development – however several through lines run through all Montessori classrooms. These are:

- ***Large blocks of uninterrupted time for self-directed work.*** The morning work period, from 8:30 to 11:30 (depending on the child's age) is especially important. For older children, an afternoon work period is also a feature of his/her day. It is critical that your child arrive at school in time to begin this period with the rest of his/her peers.
- ***The Guides' intense focus on the children.*** Successful Montessori teaching is based on detailed and ongoing observation of the children, both individually and as a group. Once the school day begins, guides are immersed in the work of the classroom, which means they are not able to give parents or other visitors attention. We support this element of the program by limiting interruption during the school day. Guides are available after school for conferences or telephone conversations.
- ***Consistency in Routines and Order in the Physical Environment.*** Children, especially those between two and five, are sensitive to routines and order and they respond positively to consistency in their daily lives. An orderly classroom environment (everything has its place and everything is in its place) fosters independence as children are given lessons in caring for their environment and sharing responsibility for its maintenance. Daily jobs, such as helping younger friends put on their coats, feeding classroom animals, or setting the table reinforce a predictable pattern of expectations. Because of the presence of routines and order, there is very little adult "correcting" of students' behavior.
- ***Meticulous attention to Grace and Courtesy.*** At all times we aspire to model good manners and sociable interactions. You should expect to be greeted with a cheerful "good morning" or "good afternoon" during arrivals and departures.

Mealtimes are opportunities to practice table manners, and lessons in making an introduction, offering refreshments, and solving problems peacefully are a regular part of the curriculum.

Primary

The Primary Program, also known as the Children's House, serves children from approximately three to six years of age. The environment is carefully prepared using Montessori principles that allow the children to choose work according to their interests and developmental level. The Montessori guide initially presents the specially designed Montessori educational materials. Each child works at his/her own pace, repeating activities, making choices, and developing abilities through exploration of his/her work. Indirect learning occurs as children observe the work of others and in turn share what they have learned with their classmates. In this way, children explore basic concepts of literacy, numeracy, geography, music, art and care of self and the environment.

The Child in Nature

Exposure to a variety of outdoor educational experiences is an integral part of the child's total development and a vital aspect of the Montessori curriculum. The goals of FCMS Montessori Outdoor Education program are to:

- Help the child explore and appreciate the natural environment and his relationship to the natural world.
- Provide close and friendly social interaction and a sense of group and community awareness.
- Build on skills learned in the classroom by transferring and adapting them to the outdoors through observing, recording, listening, identifying and comparing.
- Allow children practice in problem-solving situations in which there is an interchange of helping and receiving among children and adults.
- Encourage each child to show different skills in outdoor environments.
- Foster a sense of active creativity by integrating the arts, literacy, numeracy and science in a new environment.

Classroom Materials

Fort Collins Montessori School uses materials in the classroom that might include glass, sewing needles, scissors, tools used for preparing food such as vegetable peelers, graters and items that are small enough to be swallowed or inhaled. All of these items are essential to specific lesson presentations that our guides have been well trained in demonstrating to your child. The safety of your child is always our primary concern when using these materials. Your child will be given lessons in how to use these materials in a safe way and will be supervised. By signing the acknowledgement on the last page of this handbook, you give permission for your child to use these materials in the classroom which could pose possible hazards and that you accept these materials being in the classroom and your child may interact with these materials throughout the course of the day.

Glass Cleanup

Students will inform the teacher of glass breakage. Cones will be placed around the area where glass breakage is. Students will assist the teacher by grabbing supplies for glass cleanup and handing them to the teacher. The teacher will clean up all glass particles using specified clean up materials. If a vacuum is needed for any particles on the rug, the facility manager will be called to assist in bringing the vacuum to the classroom. Glass will be placed in the trash can and taken out of the classroom as soon as all debris is cleaned up.

Montessori Assessment

FCMS fosters the development of integrative thinkers who see and make connections within and among the disciplines. Powerful learning experiences are relevant, rigorous and coherent. FCMS's program transforms learning by supporting and encouraging self-directed reflection, inquiry and self-assessment. Guides evaluate progress on a daily basis, keeping careful record of lessons presented and skills and concepts mastered. In addition, Montessori guides compile twice yearly observational assessments for presentation at parent conferences.

Student Placement and Transitions

Continuity is a hallmark of the Montessori experience. Mixed age classrooms allow students to develop stable relationships with adults and peers over a two to three-year cycle. The stability enables both security and growth, as the child's role within the group evolves over time from being among the youngest to a community elder. Mixed age grouping also honors the unique pace at which each child develops, a process which does not always correspond to chronological age.

Because we appreciate the importance of continuity and consistency in healthy human development, we take special care in supporting the child as he or she moves through several key transitions during her/his time at FCMS. Transitions are always monitored by FCMS staff in consultation with you.

Entering FCMS

The first transition takes place when the child leaves home to become a member of his or her first classroom. We assist families in establishing a trusting relationship with our guides.

For most children this takes place at 36 months. Independent care of self (toileting, dressing, feeding) are signs of readiness for the Primary program. We also look for signs of emerging independence and sense of order. Order is seen in the child's handling of classroom materials; independence is evident in the child's ability to separate from his or her parents and to choose work in the classroom.

Many children benefit from spending an additional year in the Primary to gain greater

social-emotional maturity and to hone academic skills. This “gift of the third year” provides a student the opportunity to truly assume a leadership role prior to entering the more complicated Elementary environment. Because there is overlap between the materials and lessons in the Primary and Elementary classrooms, students who elect to spend additional time in the Primary continue to progress at their own pace. When a student is considered a good candidate for a fourth Primary year, families are consulted by December of the third year and the decision is made collaboratively between the guide, the family, and the Head of School.

Parents should be aware that placement and transition to a new division of the program at FCMS might not precisely replicate a graded program in traditional education.

Daily Schedule

7:00-8:00am Before School Care
8:00am School begins for Elementary (sign-in required after 8:30)
8:15am School begins for Primary
8:15-11:30am Morning Work Time
12:30pm Half Day Primary Class Dismissal and Recess
11:30-1:00pm Lunch and Recess
1:00-1:30pm Quiet/Nap Time in Primary Classroom
1:00-3:00pm Work time
3:00-3:30pm Afternoon School Dismissal for Primary
3:00-3:30pm Afternoon School Dismissal for Elementary
3:00-6:00pm After School Care

Attendance and Why it Matters

Consistent attendance is important. The children who benefit most from the prepared environment are those who attend regularly. There are several reasons for this:

- A consistent routine provides security for children; a sense of security enables children to learn more readily.
- A child’s experiences in the classroom and with the materials are cumulative; consistent attendance bolsters learning.
- Your own commitment to your child’s presence in school affirms the importance of school and learning. If you often invite your child to stay out of school for different activities, you implicitly undermine the importance of school in her/his mind—which can affect her performance when she/he is present.
- Intermittent attendance, or periods of long absence, can affect both your child’s adaptation to school and her learning. Please make every effort to ensure your child’s regular attendance. In this regard, we specifically request that you:
 - Schedule family vacations and trips to coincide with school holidays.
 - Schedule appointments with doctor, dentist, orthodontist, or other professionals outside of classroom hours.

Arrival Procedures

All students between the ages of 3 and 5 are required to be signed in and out by a parent or guardian when they arrive. Brothers or Sisters are not allowed to sign siblings into or out of any FCMS program.

Before School Care Arrival

Students will be accepted to the early morning program, based on registration with the Before/After Care program director.

Regular School Day Arrival

Students are dropped off via the driveline between 8:00-8:15am for Elementary. Primary 8:15am and 8:30am. Goodbyes are said at the vehicle in the driveline and the child can walk to their classroom.

Sign in Procedures

Primary students need to be signed in and out daily by an adult caregiver using the Procure App.

1. Arrive at school between 8:00-8:15am for Elementary and 8:15-8:30am for Primary
2. Observe the circular, counter-clockwise traffic pattern in the driveline.
3. Drive slowly into the drop-off lane.
4. Come to a complete stop and offer your goodbyes at the vehicle.
5. Please do not park in the drop-off lane and walk your child inside.
6. Parking is available on the north side of the building.

Late Arrivals

If your student is late, arriving after 8:30 am, you will need to bring her/him to the school office to sign them in. A staff member will escort your child to the classroom. If you know ahead of time they will be late due to an appointment, kindly call the school office at 970-999-5271

If a child arrives at school late and the class is on a field trip, the parent may take the child to join the group or the child will be placed in another classroom until his/her class returns.

Transitional Items

A key to independence is the ability to transition from home to school in a calm manner. We have found the process to run most smoothly when drop-off is swift, confident, and focused on school. Dolls, stuffed animals, pacifiers, trucks and trains actually delay this process and do little to assist. Kindly help your child separate from you by leaving favorite items at home or, at the very least, in the car. A struggle at the school entryway is difficult for everyone involved. We will be glad to offer suggestions if necessary. Please also refrain from giving your child food to ease the transition.

Storage

Each child is assigned a space in the classroom to keep their belongings. The child's belongings that he/she would be using during the day are stored in this area (hat, gloves, coat, backpack, bottles, extra shoes, personal items). Teachers encourage children and parents to keep their assigned spaces neat and organized. Some items are not allowed to be stored in these spaces, i.e. money and/or any item that states "keep out of reach of child".

Dismissal Procedures

*****Parents, please note that all Primary students must be signed out by an adult caregiver and not a sibling.***

Regular School Day Dismissal Elementary

As with morning drop-off, faculty will escort children to the car, open car doors but cannot buckle or unbuckle students into car seats, so you will be asked to buckle quickly and help keep the line moving. *Please:*

1. Enter the pull-through lane and line-up behind the other cars waiting to pick up children.
2. Pull up as far forward as possible to allow the maximum number of cars. This will speed up the line for everyone.
3. Do not park your car and walk to the door as this creates unnecessary confusion for guides and others working on safe, orderly dismissal.

Note that the City of Fort Collins will not allow cars to line up on Harmony and wait to enter the parking lot. If the line is long consider, waiting in the FRCC parking lot until the line has shortened.

For a child to be authorized to walk home (grades 1-6 only), the classroom teacher and main office must be notified in writing.

After School Care Program

Students may be picked up in the After School room by parents and must be signed out.

Authorized Student Release

FCMS will only release a child to:

- The enrolling parent(s)
- Persons listed on the child's Emergency Form when a parent does not arrive by FCMS closing time (4:10pm). FCMS prefers verbal confirmation from the parent for changes in pick-up.

For all other instances, a written notice will be required, in advance if possible. Picture ID's will always be required.

Pick-Up and Nap Time

Please refrain from picking up your child during naptime (between 1:00pm. and 1:30pm) unless it is an emergency. Specific information on naptime is available through the classroom Lead Guide. It is difficult for children to have their regular sleep schedule interrupted and it significantly impacts the napping group.

Late Pick-Up

Students who haven't been picked up at the end of the school day will be taken to the main office to wait for their ride. The office will make every attempt to contact the parent, guardian or other individual authorized to pick-up the child. However, if a child is not picked up by 3:30pm, and other arrangements have not been made, the office will send the child to after school care and all appropriate fees will be assessed for the after school program for that day.

FCMS After School Care Closes Daily at 6:00pm

Please see your Before and After School Care agreement documents for late pickups.

Out-of-the-Ordinary Departure Plans

Please notify the office for out-of-the-ordinary departure plans. As the school is responsible for your child during school hours, we must have written permission from you before we can release your child to another person. If you must pick your child up early, please call the office and let your student's teacher know beforehand. Staff will be sure your child is in the office at the specified time for pick up.

Change in Pick-up Plans

If a parent calls FCMS with a change in pick-up (due to traffic delays or other circumstances) the message will be referred to the child's classroom. In the interest of timely communication, please call FCMS before 2:45pm for end of school pick-ups if possible. Anyone designated to pick-up a child needs to be at least sixteen years of age. For the safety and security of your child, we will request photo identification of persons unfamiliar to the staff. Please inform persons on your emergency pick-up form that they will be asked for identification.

Separation and Reunion

As a family-centered community, the importance of drop-off and pick up extends beyond getting your child in and out of the building. The processes of separating in the morning and reconnecting in the afternoon are crucial to your child's sense of security. A peaceful arrival sets a positive tone for the day. Likewise, a successful reunion increases the odds that your evening family routine will run smoothly. The key to both is your attention. To make the transition process run as smoothly as possible we strongly suggest the following: Prepare your child for morning drop-off by sitting his or her car seat on the curb-side of the car.

As soon as he or she is able, encourage independence by allowing her/him to unbuckle and exit the car when the staff member is ready for your child. Reassure your child that you will see him/her later in the day. Refrain from talking on a cell phone at all times while on school property, and especially during drop-off and pick-up. When re-uniting, make eye contact, say how happy you are to see your child, and you are looking forward to a pleasant afternoon/evening.

The guide's focus during arrival and departure is on assisting the child (and you) and

making the transition to and from school. If you have questions about the child's day or wish to have a conversation with his or her guide, please contact the guide directly to make an appointment.

Appropriate Dress

Each day, children need to bring to school:

1. Clothing
2. Backpack
3. Lunch box

We ask that all of these items be as free as possible of character-themed, media influenced, scary, or violent images; these can create a distraction from our student's purpose at school and/or create acting out behaviors and disturbances. If a child arrives in distracting or disturbing clothing, or brings such a lunch box or backpack, we may ask them to change into extra clothing and to leave their lunch box or backpack at home.

Footwear: rubber soled, closed-toe shoes for outdoor use, and slippers for indoor use.

To encourage independence, clothing, including jackets, coats and sweaters, should be free of belts, suspenders, and any other encumbrances. Clothing may be any brand, but, in accordance with Montessori principles of simplicity and beauty, clothing should be free of any designs, characters, decals or written messages that could distract or disturb.

Please clearly label all clothing (jackets, gloves, hats, boots, shirts, pants, socks, undergarments) and personal items with your child's name using a permanent marker. Primary children should have a complete change of weather-appropriate clothing at school at all times, including socks. If your child is developing bathroom independence, several spare sets of clothing including underpants and socks are necessary. Should an item become misplaced, please check the Lost and Found Basket in the School Office.

Inclement Weather

Our outdoor policy states that students may be kept inside, with appropriate activities, if the temperature falls below 20°F or rises above 95°F, unless a specific activity is authorized. Please be sure outdoor clothing is sent each day that is appropriate when the weather permits. In the case that the weather is bad enough to cancel classes, we will follow the lead of the Poudre School District. Listen and watch local radio and TV channels for information.

Naps

In the Primary classroom, quiet time is after lunch between 1:00pm and 1:30pm. Each student will have a washable nap mat assigned to them. Please send a crib sheet and small blanket with your student each week as this is a licensing requirement. Each day the bedding will be removed and stored in your student's basket. On Friday, the bedding will be sent home and mats will be disinfected. Mats will also be cleaned as needed

throughout the week.

Before and After School Care

We provide before and after care for all children. Please register with all completed paperwork found on the schools website and verify that space is available on the day needed as the program does fill up to capacity on some days.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Emergency Records

It is mandatory that all health forms be kept current (Required by Colorado State Department of Education as well as Childcare Licensing: Registration Form, Emergency Card, Medical Statement, and Immunization Form). If you take your child to the doctor during the school year, please update his/her immunization record as needed. If your child's health form is not kept current, your child may be denied admission until updated. All health forms **MUST** be on file before your child begins school.

Please keep the school informed of any changes in your contact information on your child's Emergency Card. The school must have accurate phone numbers for home, work and emergency contacts. Kindly indicate on the form which number should be used first.

FCMS accepts non-immunized children with current Immunization Exemptions. Please check in with the office if you have any questions.

Illness

Be considerate of others in your child's class. Do not send your child to school if s/he is "coming down with something." Children who are not feeling well are not able to participate in the classroom. Please inform the school office that your child will not be attending school due to illness, specifying the illness when you call. Please keep your child at home until they are fully well and no longer contagious. This is so important for the well-being of all in our school community.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR EXCLUDING ILL CHILDREN:

Children with any of the following symptoms are not permitted to remain in care:

- Fever of 100.4°F higher. No rectal or ear temperatures are taken. Digital thermometers are used. Oral temperatures may be taken for preschool through school age children if single use covers are used over the thermometer. Glass thermometers contain mercury, a toxic substance, and therefore should not be used. Temperature strips should not be used because they are frequently inaccurate.
- **Diarrhea or Vomiting**
- **Earache** with fever
- Green **nasal discharge**

- **Headache** that affects activity level
- **Rash**, undiagnosed or quickly spreading
- **Eye discharge or conjunctivitis (pinkeye)** that affects activity level
- **Sick appearance, not feeling well, and/or not able to keep up with program activities.**
- **Open or oozing sores**, unless properly covered **and** 24 hours has passed since starting antibiotic treatment, if antibiotic treatment is necessary.
- **Lice or scabies:**
 - Head lice: until first treatment has begun.
 - Scabies: until after treatment is begun.

Following exclusion, children are readmitted to the program when they no longer have any of the above symptoms, she/he has been free of all fever without the aid of fever reducing medicine, vomiting, diarrhea or other symptoms of illness for 24 hours, has been on antibiotics for 24 hours, or there is a verifiable doctor's note stating the child is not contagious to those around them. This policy is required by the Health Department and is in effect for the health and safety of your child as well as that of other children and staff. The director reserves the right to determine whether or not a child will be allowed to stay.

In the case of an absence due to a contagious disease or an illness of more than three days duration, a note from your child's physician stating that it is alright for the child to return to school may be required before your child can be re-admitted to the classroom. Please note that children who are not immunized for a contagious disease must be excluded from school by law until the incubation period of the last reported incident of the disease has expired.

If a child becomes ill, has an accident, or is injured, school staff will take the child to the office clinic and fill out an incident report and the parent or legal guardian or the person(s) listed on the child's emergency information will be notified. If emergency contacts cannot be notified and immediate medical care is needed, the school will call 911. However, Fort Collins Montessori School will in no case accept financial responsibility for care. It is imperative that we have current phone numbers including at least two emergency contacts. Minor incidents and illnesses will be referred to the school nurse and/or our trained office staff.

When children have been diagnosed with a communicable illness such as hepatitis, measles, mumps, meningitis, diphtheria, rubella, salmonella, tuberculosis, giardia or shigella, Fort Collins Montessori School will immediately notify the local health department or the State Department of Public Health and Environment, all staff members, and all parents and guardians of children in care. Children's confidentiality will be maintained. Parents need to report exposure of a child to communicable illness outside of school, and, at the discretion of the Head of School, the child should be excluded from school for the period of time prescribed by the child's physician or by the local health department.

If your child develops a fever while at school or shows other signs of any communicable illness (see below), the above procedure will be followed and you will be contacted and requested to take him/her home within an hour. If you cannot be reached, an emergency contact will be called to take your child home. There will be no exceptions to this policy.

Please remember that children go outside daily except in inclement weather. If your child is unable to take part in outdoor activities because of illness, please keep him/her at home for the day since we cannot keep individual children indoors during these activities.

Medication

All medication must be given directly to the school office for proper storage: no medication may be left in lunch boxes or backpacks. Please give medication and the required Medication Authorization Form to the senior staff member present.

Prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medications for eyes or ears, all oral medications, topical medications, inhaled medications, and certain emergency injections can be administered only with the written order of a person with prescriptive authority and with written parental consent. We administer medications for chronic health conditions or emergency situations.

The written order by the licensed prescribing practitioner must include:

1. Child's name
2. Licensed prescribing practitioner name, telephone number, and signature
3. Date authorized
4. Name of medication and dosage
5. Time of day medication is to be given
6. Route of medication
7. Length of time the medication is to be given
8. Reason for medication (unless this information needs to remain confidential)
9. Side effects or reactions to watch for
10. Special instructions
11. Medications must be kept in the original labeled bottle or container unopened

Prescription medications must contain the original pharmacy label that lists:

1. Child's name
2. Prescribing practitioner's name
3. Pharmacy name and telephone number
4. Date prescription was filled
5. Expiration date of the medication
6. Name of the medication
7. Dosage
8. How often to give the medication
9. Length of time the medication is to be given

Over-the-counter medication must be kept in the originally labeled container and be labeled with the child's first and last name. In the case medication needs to be given on

an ongoing, long-term basis, the Medical Authorization Form is to be turned in on an annual basis. If more than one dose is to be administered, a licensed health practitioner must approve the administration and dosage on the Medication Order Form or a physician's prescription slip.

A written medication log is kept for each child. This log is part of the child's records. The log contains the following:

1. Child's name
2. Name of the medication, dosage, and route
3. Time medication is to be given
4. Special instructions
5. Name and initials of the individuals giving the medication
6. Notation if the medication was not given and the reason

Topical preparations such as petroleum jelly, sunscreen, bug repellent sprays, and other ointments may be administered to children with written parental authorization. These preparations may not be applied to open wounds or broken skin unless there is a written order by the prescribing practitioner, and the prescribed medication needs to contain all the information listed in the medication section.

Sunscreen

When supplied for an individual child, the sunscreen must be labeled with the child's first and last name. Children over 3 years of age may apply sunscreen to themselves under the direct supervision of a staff member. Please follow instructions for non-prescription medication if you would like sunscreen to be applied during the school day. (The parent must provide the sunscreen).

Food, Nutrition and Community

Due to licensing and health care regulations, neither FCMS nor children are allowed to prepare or share food with other children. Children must also bring their own morning snack. Students involved in Before and After School Care will also need to bring their own snacks for those times as well.

FCMS is a peanut-aware environment, and we therefore request that you do not send any foods containing peanuts in your child's lunch. This includes all foods prepared with peanut oil as well as peanut butter.

Sandwiches, cheese, crackers, and rolled lunch meat (even cold pizza) are healthy alternatives. Fresh vegetables are great additions. We recommend that fresh fruit suffice for dessert.

We will return the uneaten portion of your child's lunch so that you know what s/he has consumed and can make appropriate adjustments.

All primary lunches will be placed into the fridge upon arrival.

Suggestions for Home

Involve your child in preparing his/her own lunch. Your child can slice cheese and put crackers into a container, choose and wash vegetables and fruit, and even help make a sandwich.

Prepare the kitchen/dining room so your child can participate. Your child will want to pour her own milk or water, help with peeling vegetables, set and clear the table. You can make that process safe and fun by providing the proper equipment: a small glass pitcher, safe vegetable peelers, apple corers, egg cutters, scrub brushes, child-sized mops and brooms.

Establish a daily routine. As much as possible, have breakfast, snack, and dinner at the same time each day. This will allow your child to anticipate, and therefore participate, in school activities well. Each afternoon, let your child get ready for the next day by emptying and cleaning the lunchbox. (Please wipe out lunch boxes daily). Upon returning from school, have a small pitcher of milk or water available on a low shelf in the refrigerator so that your child may prepare his or her own snack.

Snacks

Daily snacks should be nutritionally balanced. We ask each family to provide a snack for their child daily.

Celebration Food

We discourage celebration food for several reasons. First, many children have allergies to food ingredients in foods, and it may not be obvious without extremely careful reading of preparation place and ingredients. Second, some children do not celebrate events such as birthdays for religious reasons, and would have to be excluded from a party. Third, health department regulations prevent the distribution of foods that are not pre-packaged, meaning that we can't even serve pizza if it were brought to school.

A much better alternative is to contribute a book off a teacher's "wish list". Contact your classroom Guide to learn about any items they may have on an Amazon or other wish list. Your child can present the book to the class, and the teacher can read the book. In this way your child can have a lasting presence in the classroom.

Food Allergies

Parents are responsible for providing all food, including lunch and snack, for their child to prevent food allergic reactions.

Parking Lot Safety

When parking in the parking lot to bring your child to or from school, please be sure that your child is with you at all times and not allowed to run out to your car while you visit with others.

Car Seat Safety

FCMS follows all applicable laws and safety guidelines for child safety seats. Please ensure that your child is in a safety seat upon arrival and departure from FCMS. Colorado State Legislation requires that a child under age 4 or weighing 40 pounds or less must be properly secured in an infant, toddler, or booster child safety seat in accordance with the child safety seat and vehicle manufacturer's instructions.

Colorado continues to require that all passengers regardless of age wear their seat belts. There are significant penalties and fines for violations. Additional information is available in the school office.

Security

During arrival, the school's entrance is open but monitored by staff. At 8:31am the door is closed and remains locked for the day. In order to enter the school, visitors must go to the main office and check in with a valid state ID via our Raptor Visitor system. If your child arrives after 8:31am, you must sign in with the front office so we can take your child off the "absent" list.

As stated in the Arrival/Dismissal section, FCMS is authorized to release a child only to those people permitted to pick up your child. If your child is going home with a friend after school, the School Office must have permission in writing from the parent — last minute phone calls from a parent in an emergency may be acceptable if approved by the administration.

Fire Drills

Fort Collins Montessori School will conduct regular fire drills. Emergency evacuation procedures and building maps are posted near the door of every classroom. Children are taught to respond quickly but calmly to the fire alarm, quietly lining up and exiting the building under the direction of the teacher. One teacher in each classroom will be responsible for ensuring that all children leave the classroom, and for carrying the class sign-in clipboard. The last teacher to leave the classroom will close the door. The class takes the safest, most direct route to their safe place, identified on the evacuation plan. Teachers then have children sit as a class in a line or group. Teachers take roll (using sign-in sheets) to ensure all children are accounted for. Teachers report any missing children immediately to the Administration Team. Groups must remain at their safe place until given the "all clear" by the Head of School (The Head of School will wait for an okay from the fire department if they are present).

individual evacuation plan will be made for those students with special needs to meet his/her needs

Tornado Drills

Fort Collins Montessori School conducts tornado drills as required by law. Emergency evacuation procedures are posted near the door of every classroom. In the event of a tornado, teachers are to quickly and calmly lead children to the designated "safe" areas within the building. If out on the playground, classes immediately enter the building and go to the designated safe area for their group. While waiting in the safe areas for the storm to pass, children are taught to remain calm. Teachers take the class list (sign-in/out

clipboard) with them. When the classes reach the designated safe place, children sit as a class in a line or group. Teachers take roll (using sign-in sheets) to be sure all children are accounted for. Teachers report any missing children immediately to the Admin team. Groups must remain at their safe place until given the “all clear” by the Head of School. *individual evacuation plan will be made for those students with special needs to meet his/her needs*

Lost Child

If teachers should discover a child is missing, report the missing child to the Head of School immediately. A thorough search of the building and playground areas will be conducted. If after a few minutes searching, the child has not been found, the Director will call Fort Collins Police and the parents of the child.

Other

FCMS has made extensive preparations for a wide range of emergencies, including on-site emergencies, local emergencies, and alerts issued by the National Homeland Security Office.

Here are some guidelines to follow in the event of a crisis or emergency:

FIRST RESPONSE - A notice of procedures will be posted on the school’s website (and emailed if possible). Follow instructions carefully.

- If feasible, you will be contacted directly by telephone. Remain calm and follow instructions.
- In some emergencies (a fire, for example) the children may be walked to a safe location determined by the Red Cross where you can pick them up. This will be posted on the website, and an attempt will be made to call you.
- If we are required to “shelter in place” at the school, we have provisions and are completely prepared to do so.
- In some cases, FEMA may instruct FCMS to leave the building or location or we may be told to allow no one to enter our building. These are stressful situations. Please know that your child’s well-being and safety are our top priority and that they will be carefully supervised until you can be reunited with your child.
- It is critical that you keep all records up to date in our office—including cell phone numbers, email and names of those individuals you allow to pick up your child. Consider carefully your list of those to whom we can release your child in a crisis/emergency. Please email any changes to office@focomontessori.org.
- Respond immediately to any requests for items or information related to our emergency plan.
- Keep the school’s telephone number and website handy at home, work and in your car.

The school will have a supply of emergency clothing and food for all the children in the school. If your child has dietary restrictions or medication requirements, please supply the school with a 3-day supply of special foods or medications.

FCMS follows the Emergency Preparedness guidelines outlined on the Poudre School District website.

Complaints and Reporting

Parents who are concerned about specific unresolved issues related to the preschool or Before Care and After Care could file a complaint at The Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Child Care, 1575 Sherman St., Denver, CO 80203-1714 or call (303) 866-5958 or 1-800-799-5876.

School personnel are required, by law, to report any incident of suspected child abuse or neglect to the Head of School and County Department of Social Services. Parents should report to the Head of School any inappropriate behavior or action taken by staff toward children. To report suspected child abuse, call the Larimer County Child Abuse Hotline at (970) 498-6990.

Grievance Process

The Grievance Process provides a means by which conflicts can be resolved. Parents, students or teachers may initiate this process. Such a request must be in writing and submitted to the Head of School for further action. The Head of School will then communicate with those involved in the conflict within two working days. A meeting will take place within five working days at the end of which a plan for resolution will be agreed upon. If, after completion of this meeting, the conflict has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the parties involved, it may then be taken to the Fort Collins Montessori School Governing Board of Directors for a final ruling. The procedure for filing concerns is as follows:

1. The parties will make every attempt to communicate the concern directly to the teacher, the Head of School, or the parent(s) for resolution. An appointment should be set up where the concern can be expressed in private. Care should be taken to express concerns calmly and respectfully so that an environment conducive to resolution can exist. In addition, care should be taken to not discuss the issues with others not involved in the dispute.
2. If the parties are unable to come to a resolution, they may use the Dispute Resolution Form to file their concern, in writing, with the Head of School.
3. In cases where the concern has been addressed with the Head of School, and any party remains dissatisfied with the decisions made to resolve the conflict at this level, that party may take their concerns to the Fort Collins Montessori School Governing Board. Such a complaint will be made in a written statement using the Complaint Form, which details the violation, procedures taken and requested remedy, and the complaint shall be submitted to the Fort Collins Montessori School Governing Board at least one week prior to the next Board of Directors meeting. Disputes submitted later will be addressed at the subsequent meeting of the Board of Directors. Emergency issues will be dealt with on an as-needed basis, with the Board of Directors responding at or prior to its next regular public meeting.
4. The Board of Directors may hear arguments from the parties, review prior

decisions and evidence, and make inquiries as it deems necessary. The Board of Directors shall render a written decision within ten business days after the meeting unless additional time is needed. The Board of Director's decision shall be final.

Confidentiality

Fort Collins Montessori School (FCMS) is very sensitive to the fact that information concerning you, your child, and your family is private and personal. Trust and confidentiality are essential to building trusting relationships. We are committed to maintaining your privacy and protecting your personal information. FCMS will not disclose information except as required by law or when there is a threat to the health and safety of the individuals and families we serve.

FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level. Students to whom the rights have transferred are "eligible students."

Parents or eligible students have the right to inspect and review the student's education records maintained by the school. Schools are not required to provide copies of records unless, for reasons such as great distance, it is impossible for parents or eligible students to review the records. Schools may charge a fee for copies.

Parents or eligible students have the right to request that a school correct records which they believe to be inaccurate or misleading. If the school decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student then has the right to a formal hearing. After the hearing, if the school still decides not to amend the record, the parent or eligible student has the right to place a statement with the record setting forth his or her view about the contested information.

Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student in order to release any information from a student's education record. However, FERPA allows schools to disclose those records, without consent, to the following parties or under the following conditions (34 CFR § 99.31):

1. School officials with legitimate educational interest;
2. Other schools to which a student is transferring;
3. Specified officials for audit or evaluation purposes;
4. Appropriate parties in connection with financial aid to a student;
5. Organizations conducting certain studies for or on behalf of the school;
6. Accrediting organizations;

7. To comply with a judicial order or lawfully issued subpoena;
8. Appropriate officials in cases of health and safety emergencies; and
9. State and local authorities, within a juvenile justice system, pursuant to specific State law.

Schools may disclose, without consent, "directory" information such as a student's name, address, telephone number, date and place of birth, honors and awards, and dates of attendance. However, schools must tell parents and eligible students about directory information and allow parents and eligible students a reasonable amount of time to request that the school not disclose directory information about them. Schools must notify parents and eligible students annually of their rights under FERPA

For additional information, you may call 1-800-USA-LEARN (1-800-872-5327).

GETTING INVOLVED

FCMS has a talented and involved parent body. Students and staff depend on the support of parent volunteers throughout the year. We invite you to make a valuable contribution to FCMS students and staff.

There are multiple ways to volunteer with FCMS. ***Task-Oriented Volunteers*** help with tasks around the classroom, school, or office that do not require contact with children and a background check is not needed. ***Escort Volunteers*** may help within the classroom and on campus with special activities and/or events and may escort children around campus to help keep them safe. Background checks and fingerprinting and Volunteer training attendance are required. In the case that a child with special needs is participating, other training may be required. If driving children on a “going out” (child-led, small group field trip) additional record checks are required including, driver’s record check, insurance check, transportation waiver signed. ***Committee Volunteers*** do not work with children and do not need background checks.

Task-Oriented Volunteers

Teachers rely on family participation to support some aspects of student learning. Signing up to do laundry or purchase a class need is a great way to participate. Each classroom has a room parent who coordinates these efforts. A volunteer parent from every classroom is recruited at the beginning of the school year for the role of room-parent. These parents are responsible for creating and distributing sign-ups for families to do laundry and donate items such as flowers, tea, ingredients, materials for a class project, etc.). They also coordinate one-off donations to the classroom and provide support and assistance to families as needed throughout the year.

Escort Volunteers

Elementary students who research specific topics may benefit from hands-on experiences within the community. These excursions require parent accompaniment with a limited number of students. Volunteering as a parent chaperone may require specific training and background checks.

Committee Volunteers

Here is a list of committees that rely on parent volunteers in varied capacities.

Parent Volunteer Committee (PVC) — The PVC brings the FCMS community together and supports the teachers and staff year-round. This committee meets monthly to organize school events (FCMS back-to-school picnic, FCMS day, the Chili Cook-off, meet and greet fundraisers and the end-of-the-year picnic). They also coordinate food for the staff on professional development days. They provide birthday, teacher appreciation week, and holiday gifts. This committee is funded by donations from families. New volunteers are always welcome.

Fundraising Committee — The Fundraising Committee raises money for the school through the annual Big Give. New volunteers are always welcome.

School Accountability Committee (SAC) — The SAC meets quarterly to ensure that the school meets its academic and statutory obligations. It is a five-member committee that relies on three parent volunteers.

FCMS Board — The FCMS Board meets monthly and is accountable for overall school success. Its 5-7 members include two parent volunteers, community members, and a staff liaison. Parents are welcome to attend.

FCMS has a talented and involved parent body. Students and staff depend on the support of parent volunteers throughout the year. We invite you to make a valuable contribution to FCMS students and staff.

Store Rebate Programs

FCMS endeavors to enlist the support of all parents, grandparents, faculty, staff, and other community friends in securing funds from a number of store rebate programs. We will be positioned to join many of these programs once our Federal 501 C(3) Non-Profit Application has been approved.

Other Ways of Giving

You can also give to the school through donations (financial, goods, services), planned giving, vehicles, stock, insurance policies, and inclusion in your estate. If you are interested in supporting FCMS financially, please contact our Board President.

Fort Collins Montessori School Parent Acknowledgement

I hereby acknowledge that I have received a copy of the 2026-2027 Fort Collins Montessori School Family Handbook. I understand that if I have any questions about the information in the handbook, I will address them with a school administrator.

I understand that the provisions of the handbook are the most current at this time and supersede all previous policies, manuals or handbooks issued by Fort Collins Montessori School. Further, I understand that the provisions of the handbook are subject to modification at any time, at the sole discretion of Fort Collins Montessori School, with or without notice to me.

Student(s) Name _____

Signature of parent _____

Date _____