
Montessori Learning from Home Handbook

Yonkers Public Schools

March 2020



A Vision of Learning from a Montessori Perspective

"Our aim is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his innermost core."

~Dr Maria Montessori

As we embark on a time of 'Learning from Home,' our aim is to create a Montessori-based framework that serves our students while supporting parents as we all adapt to a different daily routine. It is important to us that the children's activity during this time be enjoyable, thoughtful, challenging and rewarding.

Replicating what happens in our classrooms is not something we can achieve during this period. Our goal is to work in collaboration with families to keep alive the *culture of learning* that is unique to Montessori and provide families with support and activities that match the developmental needs and characteristics of the child.

How do we establish this at home?

The Montessori method is all about the *process*. While completion of work is important, it is our *approach* that makes all the difference. Learning is most effective when it is within a greater context. When we connect subjects and concepts, we establish meaning, which fuels motivation in students. Above all, we want children to feel connected to their learning, not simply "complete assignments" while at home.

Learning together with a sense of **exploration, curiosity and discovery** results in deeper and more meaningful experiences for children. This instills a great sense of ownership and responsibility for the child.

It is important to us that we maintain a feeling of connectedness throughout this process. We will be in regular contact in a variety of ways and continued communication between teachers and families throughout the period of closure is assured.

The guidelines throughout this Handbook (made available by the American Montessori Society) will outline how teachers and administration will support our families throughout this period of 'Learning from Home.'



The Prepared Environment

For our younger students, the learning environment is your home and surroundings. This means finding ways to support independence, engage in meaningful tasks and supplement learning through various activities suggested by teachers.

For our older Elementary through High School students, this will mean all of the above, plus establishing a quiet space, expectations and routines for any specific assignments shared by teachers.

Where age-appropriate you might like to discuss 'Learning from Home' with your child and include them in some decision-making processes:

- Ask them where to set up their space (if applicable)
- Make a schedule together that works for your family (when to take breaks / have time outdoors, etc.)
- Gather ideas for activities and projects
- Organize materials

For our older students, it will be important for them to maintain their routine of handing in work and receiving feedback from their teachers.

Overall, we can approach this as an opportunity to be creative and collaborative - we are here to support you through this process.

Practical Life

Practical life is an important part of experiential learning. It is part of every Montessori classroom and can be mirrored at home. These activities assist students in developing purposeful life skills for their continued growth and development. This includes refining fine motor and movement skills and practicing coordination, planning and problem-solving. Practical life activities:

- foster order and sequence;
- develop concentration;
- foster physical independence;
- foster the development of fine motor control; and
- provide opportunities for planning and carrying out tasks.

The Practical Life area also provides children with opportunities to contribute to family life. Inherent in these activities is the development of key executive functions: decision making, organization, problem-solving, impulse control, collaboration and communication. These skills form the foundation of a child's academic learning. For example, sequencing a task is a pre-reading skill.

Examples of practical life might include:

- setting the table;
- watering plants;
- tidying and organizing rooms;
- planning an outing;
- taking care of pets;
- preparing a snack/meal;
- helping with shopping lists/budgeting;
- repairing a bicycle; or
- planting a small urban garden.

Practical life is engaging for children at all stages of development and tasks are designed according to their level of coordination and independence. You can organize a "job chart" or list of family projects as a way to help guide your child's interests. Planning and gathering resources to complete the tasks is purposeful work.



These ideas foster a sense of contribution, responsibility, shared experiences and satisfaction.

As our children get older, these activities lead naturally to volunteer experiences and beginnings of community work. For our oldest adolescents, many of these practical life experiences are the foundation of their sense of belonging and personal vision.

The Uninterrupted Work Cycle

Establishing a routine that works for your family is an essential first step to creating a successful learning environment at home. Children are very familiar with this framework from school. In a Montessori classroom, children are given large blocks of time in order to explore their work deeply. This contributes directly to the development of concentration and provides opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve. It is the framework that fosters child-centered as opposed to teacher-directed learning.



Ownership of Tasks and Sharing of Learning

Montessori learning environments are often referred to as “optimal learning environments” because of the inherent skills and outcomes that result from being in a rich and interesting classroom, coupled with the dynamic of interactions amongst peers and teachers.

In order to foster a deep sense of ownership in their learning, we focus on two things: the developmental needs and characteristics of the child and their interests. Here are a few key points that aid in cultivating a child’s self-direction and attention to their work:

- Choice
- Participation in planning and organizing tasks
- Conversation
- Finding good resources
- Sharing of knowledge

You will be receiving regular communications from your child’s classroom teachers. We encourage students and parents/guardians to check the school website, find your child’s teacher(s) and follow the teachers’ schedule and instructions/guidance when completing work at home. The more children are involved in developing and detailing their activities, the more they can achieve.

One note regarding sharing or presenting work:

It is a regular occurrence in an Elementary (or older) Montessori classroom for children to present their work or projects to one another. This is something you can replicate at home. Planning a presentation or sharing time at the end of a project is very exciting for young children and gives our older students an opportunity to use their voice. It is an essential part of the learning process as it requires synthesis of learning to describe, explain and express oneself clearly. It feels celebratory as well!



Feeling of Responsibility and Contribution to the Community/Family

Being in a Montessori school is often described by students as being part of a big family. All of the aspects detailed above result in a feeling of belonging to a community and with that, we learn that there is a responsibility to ourselves, others and the environment.

It is our commitment to each child that they reach their fullest potential and feel that they are a valued part of our community.



PreK-K

Students may be expected to:

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions

Parents are invited to:

- Remain mindful about your child's stress or worries during this time of change
- Monitor communication about your child from their teachers
- Initiate communication with teachers about questions, ideas, concerns, feedback
- Support your child's independence in daily life activities
- Be mindful of and allow children to continue periods of concentration

Establish daily routines and expectations

- Limit screen time
- Provide opportunities for daily physical activity

Early Childhood Teachers:

- Initiate individual communications based on student needs
- Give guidance in setting up a daily routine
- Make suggestions for appropriate house chores
- Offer guidelines and suggestions for screen time
- Provide both general and individualized suggestions for activities developing fine motor skills / gross motor skills / language / numeracy
- Be prompt in replying to your emails if you need additional guidance and support

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Children aged 3 - 6 thrive in environments that promote repetition, routine and the mastery of purposeful movement
- Allow your child to choose activities and give the opportunity for periods of time without distractions
- The key to a successful learning environment is order, access to tactile resources, space to explore and meaningful activity. For the early childhood child, 'work' and 'play' should be interchangeable - a natural, fun and exciting part of life.

Lower Elementary (6 - 9 years)

Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work with guidance from parents
- Follow teachers' guidelines and academic expectations
- Work with integrity on assigned tasks - do your best!

Parents are invited to:

- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home
- Establish a consistent routine and work schedule together
- Follow along with the teachers' suggested activities to maintain skills and concepts
- Provide opportunities for your child to share/present work to you

Lower Elementary Teachers:

- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward
- Communicate in a consistent fashion with parents, replying to emails promptly
- Offer Parent resources
- Share a "Morning Greeting"
- Offer feedback to students
- Collaborate with Enrichment staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music, Library and PE

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Respect the stage of development - many Lower Elementary students are at a "concrete level" and require the Montessori materials to complete certain task. Teachers will guide you regarding what work makes sense for your child
- Develop ideas that allow the opportunity for Lower Elementary students to build from their interests. Examples may include projects, journals, creative writing, geometry constructions, Practical Life at home
- Encourage virtual socialization. Lower Elementary students are extremely social; they will need to feel connected to their friends

Upper Elementary (9 - 12 years)

Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work as independently as possible
- Follow teachers' guidelines and expectations
- Be own advocate when assistance or further clarification is required
- Communicate directly with teachers

Parents are invited to:

- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home
- Establish a routine and work schedule
- Follow along with the teachers' suggested activities to maintain skills and concepts
- Meet and review your child's assignments; provide opportunities at home for work presentations

Upper Elementary Teachers:

- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward
- Communicate in a consistent fashion with parents, replying to emails promptly
- Offer Parent Education resources
- Write a letter to the class detailing expectation during the 'Learning from Home' period
- Share a "Morning Greeting"
- Offer feedback to students
- Collaborate with Enrichment staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music, Library and PE

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Respect the stage of development - some students may still be at a "concrete level" and require the Montessori materials to complete certain tasks. Avoid "teaching" shortcuts for subjects such as Mathematics
- Develop ideas that allow the opportunity for Upper Elementary students to build from their interests. Examples may include projects, journals, creative writing, geometry constructions, Practical Life at home
- Support the need for Upper Elementary students' virtual group work - working with a friend (if possible) may be very well received
- Encourage virtual socialization. Upper Elementary students are extremely social; they will need to feel connected to their friends

Middle/High School (12 - 18 years)

Students are expected to:

- Schedule their own time
- Review both individual and group lesson expectations
- Work solidly for roughly 4 hours a day
- Submit or review assigned work according to guidelines
- Compose and maintain a portfolio of work to bring to school when classes resume

Parents are invited to:

- Check in with your child each morning to plan school work time and work space
- Maintain daily conversations about work progress
- Invite your child to prepare a meal for the family once per week
- Invite your child to contribute more than usual to household chores
- View and discuss suggested movies/web inquiries with your child when possible
- Share news items

Middle/High School Teachers:

Post hours of availability on their class page

- Provide unit/lesson guidelines
- Review assignments and provide guidance/feedback
- Establish communication with student or parent

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- In general, we expect Middle/High School students to take responsibility for completing their work within the timelines provided
- There is an opportunity for parents and students to discuss topics of inquiry from their studies. Watching or reading the news together, and otherwise having adult-style conversations is very important
- While we don't expect parents to review assignments, please do support work completion
- Adolescents crave and require social interaction. Please closely monitor ways your child is using Social Media and other means to communicate with other classmates or friends

Enrichment

Opportunities for enrichment activities have not been overlooked during school closure. These areas offer students many opportunities for self-expression, language and an outlet during stressful times.

During this period, all of our Enrichment faculty will be communicating with our families using their class pages to share ideas and suggestions for activities related to Art, Music, Physical Education, Health, Library and more.

Students who currently receive ENL (English as a New Language) and/or Special Education Services will receive communications from our Learning Support team on their class pages and via classroom teachers with suggestions and assignments.



FAQs

When and how can I reach my child's teacher?

Email remains the best way to contact a teacher. If you wish to speak to a teacher, please use email.

When can I expect a response?

In most cases, you can expect a response to emails within 48 hours.

How much communication can I expect from the school?

The administration office will communicate with you via Phone Message at least once a week. The frequency of communication from your child's teacher will vary depending on each class.

How much technology will be used?

This will vary greatly depending on the age of the students and the individual teachers. Teachers will share information, available hours and directions on their class pages with families and students. We may utilize online video conferencing in certain circumstances. Your classroom teachers will share more information with you in due course.

How will the school keep me informed on the closure?

We currently expect to re-open on April 16, 2020. Any changes to this plan will be communicated via phone message and our school and district websites.

Resources for Families

Below is a list of helpful resources for families. If parents find websites they wish to share, please email Dr. Rivera or Mr. DeMatteo to share. WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER....

Students Can Respond to Daily Writing Prompts, Inspired by The New York Times, at Home for Free
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/15/learning/students-can-respond-to-daily-writing-prompts-inspired-by-the-new-york-times-at-home-for-free.html?referringSource=articleShare>

28 Day sketch challenge
<https://brooklynartlibrary.org/28daychallenge>

Kids Activity Guide
https://www.nymetroparents.com/at-home-fun.pdf?utm_source=NYMetroParents&utm_campaign=d4b6423588-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_17_09

Activities for Artists
https://www.artsyshark.com/2020/03/18/50-things-artists-can-do-while-self-isolated/?utm_source=Updates+%26+Opportunities+3-18-20&utm_ca

Scholastic Inc Resources
<https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html>

We also have resources about stress/relaxation particular and a hub of resources for teachers/parents to work with children about the virus
itself: <https://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/coronavirus.html>

These 12 Famous Museums Offer Virtual Tours You Can Take on Your Couch
<https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours>

Cincinnati Zoo to start 'Home Safari Facebook Live' to keep kids learning during their time off
<https://www.wkyc.com/article/entertainment/cincinnati-zoo-to-start-home-safari-facebook-live-to-keep-kids-learning-during-their-time-off/95-4d957e04-50dc-4f18-9e9c-63e8dd5012f4>

Boredom Busters: 110 Fun At-Home Activities for Families & Kids
<https://familyguide.com/boredom-busters-110-fun-at-home-activities-for-families-kids-2/>

49 Montessori-inspired ideas for indoor activities with your kids
<https://www.mother.ly/child/montessori-inspired-indoor-activities>

HERE'S 33 NATIONAL PARK TOURS YOU CAN TAKE VIRTUALLY FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR HOME
<https://totallythebomb.com/heres-33-national-park-tours-you-can-take-virtually-from-the-comfort-of-your-home>

FREE ONLINE LEARNING RESOURCES
Free Resources from Lakeshore Learning
https://www.lakeshorelearning.com/resources/free-resources?utm_content=B_A_FreeResources&utm_campaign=20200220_1689045_RetailWebSpl

<https://www.techlearning.com/resources/free-online-learning-resources-for-schools-affected-by-coronaviruscovid-19>

<https://www.doe.in.gov/elearning/2020-covid-19-remote-learning>

<https://www.weareteachers.com/free-online-learning-resources/>

<https://www.kktv.com/content/news/Stuck-at-home-568831521.html>

LUNCH DOODLES with Mo Willems!

Mo Willems invites YOU into his studio every day for his LUNCH DOODLE. Learners worldwide can draw, doodle and explore new ways of writing by visiting Mo's studio virtually once a day for the next few weeks. Grab some paper and pencils, pens, or crayons and join Mo to explore ways of writing and making together. If you post your art to social media, be sure to hashtag it with **#MoLunchDoodles!**

<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/mo-willems/>



"We discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being."

- Dr Maria Montessori

