

Highland Mill Montessori Parent Handbook

Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District

2016-2017

Highland Mill



Montessori

Highland Mill Montessori School

Parent Handbook 2016 - 2017

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**Highland Mill Montessori School
Parent Handbook**

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SCHOOL HOURS:
9:00- Doors Open
9:15- Tardy Bell (students must be inside the classrooms before the bell rings or they are tardy)
4:00 - 4:30 Dismissal
Office Hours: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

History of Our School

The school community of Highland Mill Montessori began in the fall of 1996 at Billingsville Montessori School on Skyland Avenue. The program opened with federal magnet funding supplemented by state and local funds. The initial year included Pre-K through 3rd grade Montessori program and 4th-6th grades in a traditional school setting. Two diverse programs were housed in the same building. Several staff members came from Amay James which was the first Montessori program in Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools. They brought with them authentic experience as Montessori educators and provided a rich sense of the Montessori culture. Parents and staff worked together to prepare the school by painting classrooms, preparing garden areas, and setting up classrooms with furniture and materials. It was the start of a wonderful community where parents and staff work together to provide the best learning environment for all of the children attending the school. In August 2003 the program was moved to the newly built Highland Mill Montessori School on Clemson Avenue.

Our Beliefs

- Our children will learn in a culturally diverse Montessori environment that is well prepared and is safe and orderly
- Our children will learn at the highest level when family, student, and community are in partnership.
- Our children will develop socially and emotionally while excelling academically as a result of having well trained Montessori teachers

Mission Statement

Highland Mill Montessori fosters a peaceful and caring environment by embedding elements of grace and courtesy throughout the curriculum. We provide individualized, rigorous instruction that addresses unique learning styles and encourages curiosity and creativity while focusing on the Montessori curriculum to prepare student leaders for a changing global community.

General Notes

Montessori referred to the primary child:

“Supposing I said there was a planet without schools or teachers, where study was unknown, and yet the inhabitants—doing nothing but living and walking about—came to know all things, to carry in their minds the whole of learning; would you not think I was romancing? Well, just this, which seems so fanciful as to be nothing but the invention of a fertile imagination, is a reality. It is the child’s way of learning. This is the path he follows. He learns everything without knowing he is learning it, and in doing so he passes little by little from the unconscious to the conscious, treading always in the paths of joy and love.”

~Dr. Maria Montessori

Montessori spoke these words regarding the elementary child:



“The secret of good teaching is to regard the children’s intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim, therefore, is not merely to make the children understand, and, still less to force them to memorize, but so to touch their imagination as to enthuse the to their innermost core.”

~Maria Montessori

Classroom Environments

Teachers take much care in arranging the classroom with opportunities for working independently, working with a partner, or working in a small group. Our classrooms are orderly and well-cared for by staff and children. Each classroom is well supplied with Montessori materials which are displayed for immediate use by members of the classroom community. Teacher Assistants are available as CMS allots them.

Staff and Children Take Ownership of Managing Behavior

Environments where there is much independent work require an underlying structure set up with the teacher’s vision of what works for his/her particular group of children. The physical organization of the classroom is essential for facilitating children’s freedom to choose work and to move about, as they choose behavior that is appropriate for work in their classroom.

Each child should come to school with an good understanding of what is appropriate behavior. Based on this understanding, each child makes decisions and choices of how to behave. We expect behavior that shows respect for others and respect for materials in the environment. We hope to help each child realize a positive self-image as a human being with the growing potential for becoming a contributing member of our school and society.

Montessori did not agree that rewards are always the answers to positive behavior. Our modeling of appropriate behavior, asking children to reflect on the impact of their decisions on others, and redirecting the child as he experiences decision-making situations will lead to pride in one’s accomplishments without always receiving a tangible reward.

Work on independence and concentration begins in the primary grades with four and five year olds. It is essential that our children have this early opportunity to practice working independently and making choices. In addition, we offer valuable and exciting learning opportunities and establish environments that target each child’s developmental interests. As each child matures, it is expected that periods of focus will increase along with appropriate choices regarding behavior.

Children’s Work Day and Uninterrupted Work Time

The first six weeks of the school year will be an important time for your child to adapt to the Montessori philosophy of learning. During these first six weeks, our teachers will be helping your child learn how to work as a respectful member of our school community, develop the art of concentration, work independently, become familiar with classroom and school procedures, and learn to help others. This will take time and school-wide focus. As a parent/guardian, you play a major role in helping your child have a successful beginning school year experience. You can help your child by following the tips listed below:

- **Classroom and Cafeteria Visitation:** We are asking parents to refrain from visiting the classrooms and the cafeteria until after October 10th. This will allow your child six weeks to become adjusted to the classroom/school and to develop the independence necessary to be a successful learner in a Montessori school. Beginning October 6th, 2015, parents are welcome to visit our classrooms. Be sure to call the school 24-hours in advance to arrange your time with Beth Leo, our literacy facilitator. Upon arrival please sign in, get a visitors pass, and request to see Beth.
- **Escorting to Classroom:** Parents/guardians are welcome to escort their child to the classroom on their first day of school. Beginning on the second day, please refrain from escorting your child to the classroom. Your child will be greeted at the bus lot, car rider/van rider areas each morning by staff members who will supervise each child on the way to class. Montessori learners take pride in their independence within the school environment.
- **Communicating with Teachers:** Our teachers will gladly make an appointment before or after school hours to schedule a conference. Questions and/or concerns may be addressed at any time by leaving teachers a message in the teacher's voicemail (980 343-5525) or e-mail. Every attempt will be made to contact the parents within 24-hours.

Students begin their day's work as soon as they enter the classroom. This first activity may take various forms in different classrooms. Some children may begin by reading or writing. Some may work on the classroom environment or prepare their first work for the day. Others may help the teacher prepare lesson set-ups. Some may go to other classrooms to listen to readers. Some may reach for their on-going research project and seek out their partner to begin work. Work in our classrooms is dynamic and ongoing, not filled with isolated lessons. We expect that attitude and behavior will remain positive when work and assignments are purposeful and meaningful to each individual so that she or he is not just passing time until the next segment of the day, but the student is spending time on work worthy of his time and effort.

During work time we strive not to interrupt the children's work period. Children need time to complete a work cycle – including time to consider choices, choose a work, work through it, and put it away. As children work toward independence, they need time to make mistakes and correct them and to reach a sense of mastery on their own.

Materials and the Montessori Curriculum

Our classrooms are well supplied with a full range of Montessori materials. Classrooms are prepared with materials in each of the content areas – history, physical science, earth science, life science, mathematics, geometry, and language arts. Montessori materials are available to children throughout the day related to assignments or work choices made by children.

Special Area Classes

We offer special area classes throughout the week. We have specialized art, music, and physical education teachers. The media specialist and technology facilitator work on fixed and flexible sign-up schedules so students can accomplish research projects on a schedule that meets their needs.

Teachers' Credentials

Every CMS employee is licensed in North Carolina with NC Teacher Certification. We strive to begin the year with Montessori trained teachers. When this is not possible, teachers take formal Montessori training during the school year with an accredited Montessori organization.

Regarding our staff, children, and parent community:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." ~Margaret Mead, American Anthropologist

Academic Aspects of School

Progress Reports

See school calendar for reporting periods for each quarter. Teachers are required to meet with parents at the end of the first school quarter to review your child's progress. Parents and teachers can request a conference at any time during the year in order to enhance communication.

Homework

Each teacher will handle homework according to what best meets the child's needs. Please pay careful attention to the classroom requirements so you can build this organizational time for homework into your child's evening or weekend time.



Testing and Assessment

Highland Mill Montessori participates in required local and state testing programs. Math and literacy assessments are administered throughout the school year. Children in grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 must take the North Carolina End-of-Grade (EOG) test in math and reading. Fifth grade students will also take the science EOG test.

Powerschool

Parents of students in grades 3-6 can view their child's grades and academic progress at any time. Classroom assignments, test grades, projects, and overall course grades can be accessed here.

Children's Behavior

Part of our Montessori philosophy and curriculum addresses community building and respect for others. This is referred to as "Grace and Courtesy". Elementary classes place community building as an essential element in our program. Respect for ourselves, respect for others, and respect for our environment are basic building blocks to having a safe and successful school.

Please review the *Student Rights, Responsibilities and Character Development Handbook* online for consequences for inappropriate behavior. CMS and Highland Mill Montessori use this as a school-wide plan for extreme behaviors. Please sign and return Page 1- Student and Parent Acknowledgement and Pledge regarding CMS Code of Student Conduct.

Administrative

Admissions

Montessori students are selected through the lottery system of the CMS Magnet School Program in the spring of the year. There is a fee for Pre-K students for full-day and half-day participation. A limited number of scholarships, for which families must qualify financially, are available. Pre-K students must be four years old by August 31st. If immunization requirements are not met, a child may not attend school.

Emergency Information

In case of an emergency, the blue emergency information sheet must be up-to-date with phone contact numbers and addresses. **Call immediately with any changes.**



Attendance Requirements

Attendance is Required

Research indicates there is a clear relationship between good attendance and academic achievement. Students are required to attend school every day, arrive on time, and stay until the 4:15 PM dismissal. Children who arrive late miss valuable directions from their teacher and tend to have difficulty focusing on their work at the beginning of the day. Each year all schools in North Carolina are rated according to the percentage of students who attend school regularly. Records will be maintained and efforts will be made to communicate with parents regarding absences, truancy, tardies, and late afternoon pick-up.

*How can you most help your child succeed academically?
Make sure your child arrives on time and attends school every day.*

Excused Absences

Absences from school are excused for illness, religious holidays, and death in the immediate family. When a child returns to school, parents are required by law to notify the school of the reason for the absence by e-mailing the school secretaries, Vickie Joyner (vickie.joyner@cms.k12.nc.us) or Monica O'Neal (monicaj.oneal@cms.k12.nc.us.) Copy your child's teacher on the e-mail. You can also send a written note to your child's teacher or call the school office at 980-343-5525.

Please notify the school if your child will be absent three or more consecutive days. Parents/guardians are responsible for getting missed work from the teacher.

Tardies

It is very important for your child to arrive at school on time – by 9:15 AM. Daily instruction begins at 9:15 AM. Students who arrive at school after 9:15 AM must be escorted to the office by an adult. Students will receive a tardy pass to class. The student is listed as being late in his/her official attendance record.

In the event of an emergency requiring your child to leave school early, please come to the office and tell the secretary that you need to sign your child out early. The secretary will guide you through the signing out process. Office staff will call the teacher to send your child to the office for dismissal. For safety reasons, parents are not allowed to go directly to the classroom to get a child. The teacher will only release a child after the student has been called from the office. If returning on the same day, please take your child to the office to sign back into school.

Transportation Changes

The staff at Highland Mill Montessori takes the responsibility of keeping your children safe at all times very seriously. At dismissal time, it is very important that we know how you, the parent/guardian, want your child transported home. Therefore, teachers will follow the regular afternoon transportation plan that you have set in place for your child unless the office receives a written notice or e-mail from a parent/guardian. *Transportation plans cannot be altered based on information from your child.* Please notify the school office *no later than 3:30 PM* of a transportation change. The school will only release students to a parent or to the person(s) listed as approved to pick up your child in an emergency. Others will not be allowed to pick up your child from school. The school has the right to ask for picture identification before we release a child to any adult.

Revocation of Magnet Assignment

In 2010, the School Board passed Policy JCA, Section VII: Guidelines for Revoking Assignments to Schools other than Home School. It reads, in part: "A student may be reassigned to his or her home school if the student: has an excessive number of absences, tardies, early dismissals, and/or is not transported from campus in a timely manner after the end of the school day or after-school activity."

Avoid Early Dismissal

The instructional day ends at 4:00 PM. The expectation is that students remain in class until 4:00 PM to maximize the instructional day. Please avoid picking up your children early. (Did you know that checking your child out just 10 minutes early each day results in your child missing 30 hours or 5 days of instruction?) Parents must contact the school office in writing (note, fax, and e-mail) before 3:30 PM for transportation changes. After 3:30 PM students are not called from class. Early dismissals are disruptive to the whole classroom and interfere with student learning. Please make every effort to schedule appointments before and after school hours or during school breaks.

Optional Half Day Pre-Kindergarten Dismissal

A staff member will escort **half-day Pre-K's** to the office at 1 PM. You have the option to pick up your child just before his or her scheduled lunch time, as well. Tuition is pro-rated for the half-day program.



Communication

Home-School Communication

Your child's teacher will keep in contact with you as needed by phone, notes, newsletters and other appropriate means of communication. Each teacher will provide an overview early in the first quarter of how assessments will be shared with you. Please notify the teacher when you have concerns.

Your child might not have homework each day, as much work is done with Montessori materials throughout the day. When you ask about your child's day, ask about something specific. Instead of, "How was your day?" ask, "Who did you play with today and what did you do?" or "What did you learn in math today?" or "Did you write a story or did you do research today? Tell me more."



Food

Breakfast, Lunch, and Snacks

Please be mindful that our Montessori curriculum emphasizes sound nutrition. Students are not allowed to bring sodas to school and sweets should be limited. To maximize time available for eating and fostering your child's independence, please select food packaging and containers that students can open. This is a wonderful, Montessori "practical life" work to practice at home.

- Car riders must arrive by 9:05 in order to eat breakfast.

Please read nutrition alerts on sending food to share with others. Many students have allergies to foods that result in serious medical problems (especially peanut products). Commercially prepared food is NOT permitted in the cafeteria at any time. Doing so violates Child Nutrition Guidelines. If you eat lunch with your child, please bring a bag lunch or purchase a school lunch. **see attached regulation.*

Debit Policy

- CMS has established a debit policy to allow elementary students without meal money the opportunity to purchase meals until the parent can be notified of the need for funds. This policy is intended to supply a breakfast or lunch meal only and cannot be used for a-la-carte purchases.
- The cafeteria manager will print a list of students with a negative balance weekly. The cafeteria manager will call parent/guardian of students on list. If the parent is unresponsive, the school counselor will make a home visit to assist the parent in completing a meal application or help parents determine how their child will get meals until money is sent.
- Students with a negative balance will not be allowed to purchase a-la-carte items. Any cash that the student presents for payment will be applied to the debit. A-la-carte items may be removed from the student's tray at the cash register.
- Reminders will be put in newsletters going home to parents of the **PAYPAMS** web site where they can check account balances and deposit money by debit or credit card.
- Account balances follow the student until they graduate or leave the system.
- The cafeteria manager will complete Financial Obligation Forms for students with a negative balance at the end of each year. Forms will be distributed to teachers by May 15th. Report cards will be held until payment is received.

Applying for Free/Reduced Meals

Complete an application for meal benefits. This Free/Reduced Lunch application is available on-line or from the school. Go to: **CMS homepage > schools > menus > documents > meal application**

- Only one application needs to be completed per household. You may apply for meal benefits anytime during the school year.

- Return the completed application by mail to Child Nutrition Services.
- You will be notified by US Mail when your application is processed.
- For additional instructions on completing a “Family Meal Application,” call Child Nutrition Services (980-343-6325) between 7:30 AM and 4:30 PM or e-mail lunch@cms.k12.nc.us.

Snacks

Each teacher will let you know how the class will handle snacks during the day.

Health and Safety



Clothing and Uniforms

Students should wear comfortable clothing every day.

- Running shoes with Velcro or shoelaces are good choices. Outside exercise is important. Please do not wear shoes that are inappropriate.
- Children sit on the floor each day for lessons. Girls should wear skirts or dresses that are appropriate when seated cross-legged. Shorts or tights worn under dresses are encouraged.

Uniform Options

- Pants/skorts/knee shorts/capris: khaki and navy
- Shirts: red, white, and navy collared sports shirts (polo-type – short/long sleeve) no emblems
- Another option for girls includes a khaki or navy jumper dress
- Belts can be black or brown
- Khaki bottoms/jumpers can be worn with any of the three shirt colors (red, white, or navy)
- Shoes should be closed toe/no wheelies or shoes with laces
- Incidents of dress code deviations will be addressed individually
- Items may be found at various stores and online: Famous Mart, Sears, Wal-Mart, Target, Old Navy, Goodwill, thrift stores, etc.
- **Sweaters or jackets worn inside during the school day must be a solid color-red, white, or navy.**

Dress Down Days/Spirit Days

- The dress code will be relaxed on selected days, as scheduled/announced, and regular clothing may be worn.
- Shorts and skirts should be at the line of fingertips when arms are to the side (below mid-thigh).
- Clothing should not expose undergarments, chest, or midriff. Button shirts must be buttoned.
- Three-finger rule for tops: Straps should span at least three fingers in width.
- Pants should fit on the waist.

**A good rule of thumb: If you have to wonder about whether clothing item is appropriate, then choose something different!*

Meeting the Needs of Low Income Families

- The PTA will provide access to the standard code of dress items for our low income families.

Campus Safety

Our school makes every effort to provide a safe place for your child. The school is equipped with a video, intercom entry system and electronic doors. Electronic keys are only assigned to staff members. Our building also has 18 cameras located throughout the school for additional security measures. Hall passes are required when a student leaves the classroom. Students remain within the boundaries set by their teachers when outside. Visitors sign their names at the desk in the office when they arrive and leave the building. We encourage our staff members to guide anyone without a visitor’s badge to the sign-in area in the office.

Emergency Drills

The staff and students of Highland Mill Montessori practice emergency drills on a regular basis. First, we conduct a practice fire drill each month. Second, we also practice emergency procedures in case of a tornado. Finally, staff members and students practice “lockdown” procedures in case an unfriendly visitor

comes on the school grounds. Your children may talk about these emergency drill experiences at home. Please help them understand how these practices and procedures help keep all of us safe at school.

Emergency Notification

If the entire school day is cancelled or opening is delayed, notification will be made available through local radio and television stations by 5 AM or scheduled airtime. If school is canceled, all other planned student activities for that day will also be canceled. If school has to close early after students have arrived, local radio stations will make an announcement regarding early dismissal. A *Connect-ED*® message is sent to all parents using contact emergency information on file. It is important that parents complete the *Emergency Early Dismissal Form* which requires parents to provide information on your child's transportation in case school is closed during the school day. Working parents should make emergency arrangements for childcare on days when school is forced to close early. If an emergency event that forces school to close early, children will be dismissed from school according to what is listed on the *Emergency Early Dismissal Form*. Please remember that during such an emergency, the school may not be able to contact parents or to receive incoming calls from parents.

Medications

CMS Board Policy states that no medication, prescription, or over the counter medication, can be dispensed by the school without written permission from the physician. Medication authorization forms are available in the main office or at:

<http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/csh/documents/medication%20authorization%20form.pdf>

- A separate form must be filled out for each medication. The form(s) must be filled out before any medication can be given.
- Children may never keep medication in a backpack.
- Students may never take any form of medication, prescription or non-prescription, even a cough drop, on their own.
- All medicines must be kept in the main office.

Children who are sick, contagious, or who have a fever should not come to school. Please give the school up-to-date contact numbers in case of an accident or illness. If your child has allergies or other health-related illnesses that may require special attention, please give that information to the teacher and main office.

Money at School

Other than meal money, your child should not bring money to school. Necessary special project or field trip money collection will be announced ahead of time.

Parent Involvement and Volunteers



We believe that parents are the child's first and most important educators. Highland Mill Montessori emphasizes the importance of the family in the child's development and we seek to create a partnership with parents. We believe the school becomes "healthier" and more complete with its collaboration with parents, as we both work to support our children.

We encourage parent participation in our school's everyday affairs, as well as special events. There are so many ways to volunteer and help support our children and the school. Various options may include: listening to readers, helping with school-wide events, chaperoning fieldtrips, acting as a class helper, tutoring opportunities, helping in the media center, compiling Thursday folders, gardening, serving on special committees, and with classroom clerical tasks such as copying papers, laminating materials, etc... Please reach out to your child's teacher or the PTA to learn how to get involved!

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

The PTA will distribute information to you regarding meetings special events. The goal is to have every parent help in various ways throughout the school. Please sign in at the front desk and register your time when you visit with us.

School Leadership Team (SLT)

The SLT is comprised of individuals who are interested in advising the principal and helping with the planning and focus of the school program. The team meets throughout the year to discuss school issues. We encourage parental participation because your perspective is valuable. Monthly meetings are held at 8:00 am on the third Thursday of every month.

School Calendar

School calendar(s) can be found on the CMS website. Please use it as a resource to plan for child care on holidays and teacher workdays. Please note that 10/11, 1/13, 3/1, 4/26 are early release days for students. School will dismiss 3 hours early.

Transportation



Car Pool

Drivers must wait in their cars in the carpool line to pick up and drop off children. If you have designated a driver for, please inform this person of this procedure. You will receive two (2) dashboard tags from your child's teacher that will display your child's name and teacher. To expedite this process, please display these cards daily. We do not allow an undesignated person to take your child, so always indicate alternative drivers on the emergency form.

- Please note that no child is to be dropped off at school prior to 9:00 a.m. The building is locked until the 9:00 bell signals time for entry. It is unsafe and unlawful for children to be left outside unattended.
- Car Riders can only be dropped off at the front door after their car has progressed through the car rider line. Students must remain in the car until that time. Dropping children off on Clemson Avenue or in the school parking lot is a violation of school policy. Non-compliance of this rule may result in removal from the CMS magnet program.
- **All car riders must be picked up by 4:30 in the afternoon. Children who are picked up after 4:30 three or more times in one quarter will be subject to dismissal from the CMS magnet program.** This is a safety issue as students do not have supervision after 4:30.

Bus Riders

- For all Pre-K students, an adult is required at the bus stop to put the child on the bus in the morning and be at the stop to receive the child in the afternoon. Pre-K students will not be allowed to get off the bus if a designated adult is not present and will be returned to the school for parent pick-up. Having an adult at all stops for any age student is strongly recommended but is required for Pre-K.
- Bus stop times are approximate. To allow for traffic conditions, be at the stop ready to meet the bus 15 minutes before the designated time. At the beginning of the year, times will change as new students are added to a route or parents decide not to use a stop. Please be flexible.
- All bus stop changes require an application to be submitted on-line at <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/transportation/Pages/default.aspx>. No changes will be effective until the school receives notification of approval from the Transportation Department. Please note that every change means the bus route must be re-written and could affect the stop times for other children.
- Buses will load and unload from the circle at the front of the school.
- If your child rides the bus to/from a daycare, the provider must agree to follow transportation procedures including physically standing at the stop.

Bus Information

If you need to make changes in transportation, expect a waiting period of approximately 10 school days before the new route can be established. Magnet school transportation information is available at <http://www.cms.k12.nc.us/cmsdepartments/transportation/magnetinfo/Pages/default.aspx>.

Guidelines for Riding the School Bus

Highland Mill Montessori follows the school system's Bus Guidelines for behavior in your *Student Rights, Responsibilities and Character Development Handbook*. Please discuss these rules with your child.

If there are any changes in your child's daily transportation plan the office must be notified by 3:30 PM in writing (note, fax, e-mail). Changes in bus transportation require prior approval of an administrator. Remember, no early dismissals will be allowed after 3:30 PM.

Visitor's Policy

For security and the safety of our students, all visitors must sign in at the main office and wear a sticker or badge indicating they have registered. Please be aware that our staff is told to kindly question anyone seen without an identification badge or sticker provided upon signing in.

Weather Related Closings/Early School-wide Dismissals

In the event that school is called off due to inclement weather condition or for other reasons, tune into local news channels or the radio. **Please do not call the school**. We ask that you keep the school phone lines open so that we can receive emergency information to ensure a safe and orderly dismissal.