



Children's House

Handbook

2023-2024

"All that we ourselves are has been made by the child we were in the first two years of our lives."~ Maria Montessori

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The Child

“The most important period of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to the age of six. For that is the time when man’s intelligence itself, his greatest implement, is being formed.” ~ Dr. Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*

The Children’s House

Dr. Maria Montessori characterized the three to six year old child as possessing an extraordinary capacity to absorb information from his or her environment – an ability she termed “the absorbent mind.” A young child can learn his or her native language without the formal instruction and conscious effort an adult must make to learn a foreign language. They are like little sponges, using all their senses to soak up information from their environment. The Montessori method of education allows children in this sensitive period to learn to read, write and calculate in the same natural way they learn to walk and talk. **Although we understand and encourage the value of play and imagination, Montessori is not a play-based curriculum which is the default for most preschool programs.**

A typical three-year Children’s House Program begins when a child is about three years old and develops readiness through increased interest in socialization, independence in dressing and toileting, a strengthening in focused attention, and growth in emotional maturity. Children’s House can be considered a **three-year Kindergarten**. There is no curriculum ceiling as as a child shows readiness, they will continue their learning with materials. The mixed-age classroom provides an opportunity for younger children to learn from older peers, while older children learn patience and nurturing as well as gain great leadership and satisfaction in teaching a younger child how to complete a “work.” Ideally, the child will then remain with the same teacher in the same classroom for the three-year program, which includes completion of the traditional “kindergarten” year. This allows the child to work at his or her own pace, learning from others along the way, and to finally become the older child who passes on knowledge to the younger children, thereby reinforcing his or her own knowledge and boosting confidence and leadership.

Students enrolled in the Children’s House Program spend every weekday morning from 8:30-11:30 a.m. in a beautiful environment prepared especially for this developmental stage. The classroom is appealing to the eye, orderly and stimulating. The materials encourage hands-on exploration. The table, chairs, sinks and shelves are all sized for children so they can easily and comfortably complete their work, mostly independent from the adult.

Children in a Montessori classroom have great freedom within a structure of community rules. Respect for themselves, for others, and for the environment forms the basis for all community rules. Children may have a snack when they are hungry, go to the bathroom when they determine the need, work independently to complete a task, or work quietly with another child. A child may choose to watch birds or other wildlife from the window, have some quiet time with a book, or paint a picture. They may also choose to complete a work from any of the five main areas of the classroom:

- **Practical Life:** This area enhances development of task organization, concentration, stamina, and cognitive order through care of self, care of the environment, exercises of grace and courtesy, and coordination of physical movement. Activities in this area may include preparing and serving a snack for the other children, arranging a vase of flowers, watering plants, scrubbing a table clean or polishing their shoes.
- **Sensorial:** This area enables children to order, classify and describe impressions in relation to length, width, temperature, mass, color or other characteristics. Activities in this area may include stacking cubes to make a tower, comparing wooden rods and arranging them according to length, or arranging cylinders of varying diameter.
- **Language:** Language arts include oral language development, written expression, reading, grammar, and children’s literature. Reading and writing skills are developed through the use of sandpaper letters, alphabet cut-outs and various presentations allowing children to link sounds and letter symbols effortlessly and to express their thoughts in writing. **Spanish** language arts are introduced in morning classes with a Spanish teacher weekly in a group setting. Kindergarten students have expanded Spanish language instruction in the afternoon kindergarten class weekly.
- **Mathematics:** The Montessori math program makes use of manipulative materials that allow children to better internalize concepts of quantity, symbol, sequence, and operations. Activities in this area may begin with many materials to introduce and solidify the concept of 1-10 and the meaning of zero. Additional math manipulatives support the understanding of math concepts such as skip counting, addition, and
- **Social Sciences:** This area of the classroom exposes the child to basics in geography, history, culture and life sciences. Activities in this area may include making a map of the continents, working with land and water models to create a lake, or learn about plant and animal life in different ecosystems. In the sciences, children are introduced to concepts of living and not living, life cycles of plants and animals, and new vocabulary. Music, art, and movement education are part of the integrated cultural curriculum.

The certified Montessori teacher in each classroom serves not as the center of attention, but as an observer and guide who assesses each child’s unique interests and progress. The teacher demonstrates a work, spends one-on-one time with a child to overcome a problem, or leads a small group activity. The teacher directs children to an activity appropriate for their development or redirects children whose actions may be disturbing the other children at work. A teaching assistant also helps maintain harmony in the room and ensures the classroom materials are prepared and correctly ordered each day.

Rock Prairie Montessori School has three Children's House classrooms. When you enroll you will receive a Welcome Packet in mid July that contains a letter from your child's teacher. Please refer to this letter for specifics on your child's classroom.

A Three-Year Program *The Rationale for Three-Year Attendance in a Montessori Program*

“Montessori’s early childhood approach is based on Maria Montessori’s conception of the “absorbent mind,” which from 0-3 years of age operates in an unconscious manner and from 3-6 years of age is developed with the child’s growing awareness and active participation. The years from 3 to 6 are one phase of growth, with physical, intellectual, and psychological characteristics common to that entire period.

This concept necessitates an educational approach with an extended time frame within which the individual child has room to grow at her or his own pace and have tactile materials that allow the whole child to develop.

The three-year cycle also relates to Maria Montessori’s proven theory of age-mixed and non-graded classes. This is not just a simple matter of 3-4 year olds, 4-5 year olds, and 5-6 year olds spending time together in one environment. The younger children learn from older children who, in turn, have come up from “the ranks” (Parent/Infant and Toddler classes) and are well on their way to being self-directed. Such quality is hard to achieve with frequent and substantial turnover.” ~ *Sonja M. Donahus, AMS instructor*

RPMS Three-Year Program:

Each year of the three-year program prepares the child for the wonderful world of education that will follow. Most importantly, each year gives them experience in building their own character and building their own community, where there is kindness and caring of each individual.

Although there are marked individual differences, the following is a brief picture of Montessori Children’s House, year by year:

First Year:

Three-year-olds enter the school community where they are the youngest members; eager and full of questions. They learn that there are ground rules that never change. They learn that they are free to do what is right. In general, their greatest needs and interests at this time are: 1.) coordination and refined control of movement - given mainly through the Practical Life exercises 2.) words- i.e. increasing their working vocabulary - we pronounce clearly and slowly the words they are learning and we engage them in conversations and give them an opportunity to speak in a group 3.) sorting out impressions that have accumulated since birth through the use of the materials for Sensorial Development, which is the foundation for intellectual development. Formal lessons are given as the child demonstrates both interest and readiness.

Second Year:

They come back to school to discover that they are leaders! In fact, they turn into the lawgivers. They know all the rules and routines and are very helpful in trying to keep the new little ones on track. At the same time they are now more aware of the activities and projects of the older children and through this prepare for what is coming. They are now capable of handling more complex practical life lessons, they begin writing and blending sounds, the sensorial refinement exercises continue and formal lessons in all areas continue depending on both interest and readiness.

Third Year:

This is where it comes all together. If this is the child's kindergarten year, students are encouraged to enroll in our Kindergarten Program that includes the mixed age group in the morning and extended work time in the afternoon with all kindergarten age students. The blending of sounds becomes the joy of reading and writing. The counting from the previous year sets the foundation for wonderfully interesting lessons involving the four operations (addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division) with manipulative materials. Mathematical concepts are clearly presented, freely practiced, and permanently internalized. Puzzle maps used at age four, (sometimes three) are brought out again so the children can make their own maps and learn names of continents, countries, and states. They are exposed to grammar and written composition, botany, geography, geometry, zoology, and music theory. They have a watchful eye on the younger children and are lovingly ready to help whenever needed. At six or seven, they are ready to move on to a bigger and more complex environment taking with them capabilities and understanding that is the basis of real self-esteem, confidence, and eagerness to discover a bigger world: Montessori Elementary.

What To Bring The First Day

- **Extra Clothes:** Many activities involve water and paint; please send an extra complete set of clothing (bottoms, tops, underwear, and socks). Please mark each item with your child's first initial and last name. Each child has a cubbie in their classroom with a cubbie box with their name on it. Please supply an extra set of season appropriate clothing for your child to keep in their box in case they need to change their clothes.
- **Backpack:** Your child will need a good-sized backpack. Backpacks should be large enough for extra clothes and papers for easy transitions to other classrooms or going home. Simple is best.
- **Lunch:** If your child stays for lunch, please send a nutritious cold lunch. We provide milk and water.

Communication

We feel that communication is one of the most important elements of our program. In order to fully support each child and family, we need to communicate regularly and openly. At Rock Prairie Montessori School we do that in a variety of ways.

Children's House uses electronic forms of communication to share photos and classroom messages.

During the day teachers will be busy caring for children and may not be able to speak on the phone.. You may leave a phone message, and teachers will return your calls as promptly as possible. E-mail is also a wonderful way to communicate and we will respond as soon as we are able as well.

Children's House Conferences are held twice during the school year: one in the fall and one in the spring. We have a designated conference day (no school for students, childcare provided during your conference) and one evening opportunity (no childcare available) for you to choose a conference appointment. All conferences must be scheduled in the designated dates and times posted.

Children's House Routines

Keep in mind at times we may begin an activity later or earlier than the general schedule below suggests in order to better support the needs of the children.

Before Care:

7:20 - 7:45 am: Families arriving in this time frame will bring their child to the GYM and sign in on the provided weekly log.

7:45 - 8:15 am: Families arriving during this time will bring their child to their regular morning classroom.

*****Only children enrolled in the Before Care program may enter the classroom prior to 8:15.**

Montessori Morning:

8:15 am: Children's House teachers open their doors and greet children at the door.

Parents/caregivers are encouraged to say goodbye at the door. At this time, and depending on the teacher's plan for the day children may have a line activity with lessons or begin working on tasks in the classroom.

8:35 am: Arrival time ends and the classroom door is closed. **Any arrivals after 8:35 must sign in with the office. Your child will be escorted to their classroom by office staff.**

8:35-10:30 am: Group and independent work time.

8:35-10:30 am: Open snack area is available for children during this time.

10:30 am: The snack area is closed for the morning and the children participate in a group time that involves new lessons, singing, creative movement, finger plays and storytelling.

10:50 am: Weather permitting the children and caregivers spend time on the outdoor playground.

11:15 am: Dismissal time for morning children begins.

11:30 am: Dismissal ends. Children who have not been picked up will walk to the office with their teacher. Students who stay for Montessori Enrichment and Kindergarten (afternoon programs) prepare for lunch. More information on Montessori Enrichment and Kindergarten can be found in this handout.

Dress for Success

Children learn self-respect through self-mastery. Gross motor development is critical to a Montessori curriculum. Children need to be free to run, jump, climb, and work with success.

Children should wear supportive, rubber-soled shoes with backs to school each day. Shoes should not have heels. If sandals are worn, they should have rubber soles and straps in the back. In addition, they should encourage, by design, safety and freedom when running and climbing. If a child comes to school wearing improper school shoes for their safety they will not be able to participate in any gross motor activities like Creative Movement and recess.

You can assist your child by purchasing comfortable loose clothing with large buttons, big zippers. Children work with water, paint (washable, non-toxic tempera), and a variety of foods. Aprons are worn but stains still happen. Clothes that you do not want stained should not be worn.

Although our winter months are cold and snowy, we go outside as much as possible. In winter, provide hats, gloves, mittens, and snow pants, as well as boots that slip on and fasten easily. Remember our goal is independent dressing.

We stay inside if the wind chill drops below 10 degrees.

PLEASE LABEL ALL OF YOUR CHILD'S CLOTHING WITH HIS OR HER NAME.

Toileting

Children's House students are expected to be independent with toileting. Children are independent with toileting when they recognize when their bladder/bowel is full and can successfully manage going to the bathroom on their own. Occasional accidents do happen and are not unexpected. The key to success is the ability to change into dry/clean clothes with minimal assistance. Exceptions can be made if a child has a medical problem that prohibits toilet independence. Please keep the teachers informed of any medical issues.

Illness

Please refer to the Family Handbook for our policy for illness.

Snack

At Rock Prairie Montessori School we encourage and model healthy eating to promote good health. We have found that children appear to eat better and are less hungry throughout the day when they have food provided by their family which is familiar and satisfying. **For morning only students, only 1 snack is needed. For those staying past 3:30 pm, those students will need 2 snacks** (1 morning / 1 afternoon) in addition to their lunch. We will continue to provide milk and water during snack and lunchtimes. Please also send your child with their own water bottle daily.

Show & Share

Show & Share is typically once a week. Each Children's House teacher has more specifics on how Show & Share works in their classroom. Show & Share is an opportunity for your child to bring in an item from home to talk about and share information. This activity is always fun for the children and is an important confidence builder. Please assist your child in choosing an appropriate item to share. Look for things the class can learn something from. Items found in nature, science/history items, or souvenirs from a recent trip are some good examples. Please avoid bringing toys in to share.

Birthday Celebrations

Birthdays are a special time to celebrate your child's personal history. Each classroom has a unique way to honor this special day for your child including "walking around the sun" for each year of your child's life since birth. We will sing happy birthday and your child may share a treat with the class. This celebration is documented with pictures and sent to the family that day.

Creative Movement

Rock Prairie Montessori also offers children a variety of opportunities to learn and grow outside the Children's House classroom. Every day, Children's House students are encouraged to play outside, weather permitting, or in the school's gymnasium. Through such activities as running, skipping, throwing balls, raking, shoveling, tumbling and jumping, children develop large motor skills, enhance muscle development – and have fun! In addition to regular playtime, Children's House students have a once-per-week Creative Movement (Physical Education) Class.

Peace Education

Position statement: *Peace curriculum is an integral part of the Montessori curriculum designed to help each child reach their full potential as a positive contributor to our society. The curriculum is designed to be non-religious and non-culture specific - rather to focus on the inner well-being of the child (his/her spiritual health).*

Guiding principles: Inner well-being (spiritual health) develops from six basic areas. To aid the child in their development, these are addressed through the curriculum:

- Awareness of community and one's impact on it (grace & courtesy, problem solving, conflict resolution)
- Connecting with ourselves and others with compassion and love (modeling a culture of love and compassion)
- Understanding that all humans have basic needs and rights (everyone eats, plays, sleeps, wants to learn)
- Awareness of self (breathing, yoga stretches, sensorial work, emotion naming)
- Awareness of cultures (our own and others, geography studies)
- Awareness/Appreciation for our environment (wonder and awe for all that surrounds us; science studies)

In the Classroom: The peace curriculum - like most curriculum in a Montessori environment is interwoven as activities that can be found throughout the classroom/day that exercise these skills. Many areas of practical application in the classroom are listed above. Specific "peace" works include; making silence during line activities, having a quiet table where a child can use materials that encourage calmness, (zen sand garden, finger labyrinth, etc) using a peace token for reflective listening and conflict resolution, emotion work, introducing vocabulary of peace words, learning about peacemakers, thankful work, and yoga cards for control of body movement.

Children's House Integrated Music Curriculum

Music is purposefully integrated within the Montessori Children's House environment where children can have organic or chosen experiences to explore music as well as teacher-led introductions to musical concepts. The curriculum introduces elements of rhythm, pitch, timbre, intensity, and form.

Spanish Language Program

The Children's House foreign language curriculum focuses on exposing children to different cultures/languages, through reading books, incorporating foreign language vocabulary in works; learning color words, number words, and greetings, as well as further exploration into the culture which could include food activities, art projects, and singing. This gentle immersion into learning a new language is meant to peak a young child's natural curiosity of the world around them.

Children's House Benchmarks of Independence

Care for Self:

- help in making their lunch.
- brush their hair in the morning.
- dress themselves and put on their own jacket/coat.
- put on their socks and shoes. Even if they need help with tying, etc., they can make the effort.
- remember their backpack, jacket, lunch, work folder/binder, etc.
- carry their own belongings (backpack, lunch, snack, etc.) to class.
- walk into class from the morning car line by themselves.
- go to the bathroom independently as long as their clothes are not a hindrance.
- pour their beverages.
- clean up after themselves when finished eating.
- carry their plate to the kitchen after meals.

Care for the Environment:

- sort silverware after it has been washed.
- sweep floors.
- put away their toys.
- straighten their room.
- sort clean socks, fold towels, etc., on laundry day.
- have responsibilities in keeping the environment clean and tidy.
- help prepare veggies/fruit for meals at home.
- help plant flowers, weed flower beds, water plants, etc.
- be involved in healthy food choices.

Interpersonal Skills:

- show respect for others.
- wait patiently without interrupting conversations.
- use nice table manners.
- understand not to take or use things that belong to others without asking for permission.
- begin to solve problems with little or no interference from adults.
- feel empathy for others.

The road to independence is not always easy. We want you to know it is okay:

- if your firm limits disappoint, anger, or sadden your child.
- if your child is crying or upset when they come into class. It is helpful that you are confident at this separation. We will call you if needed.
- if your child's clothing is not perfectly matched. It shows that they have been given the opportunity to make their choice independently.
- if your child makes mistakes. It allows them to learn on their own.
- if your child's hair is not perfectly coiffed and/or groomed.
- if your child spills when pouring, drops when carrying, or does not clean up "perfectly."
- if your child misspells words and writes letters and/or numbers backwards.
- if your child forgets his backpack, lunch, folder, etc. on occasion. The natural consequences that occur may keep it from happening in the future. (The teacher will make your child a lunch.)
- if you let your child try to solve their conflicts on their own before intervening.
- if your child is brought to school in their pajamas if you have had a particular difficult time that morning.
- if your child brings leftovers for lunch.
- if your child is not eager to do academic work when they get home.
- if your child does not want to share about the days events with you.

Montessori Enrichment For Children's House Students

The Montessori Enrichment program is an extension of a child's Montessori day. Students who need a full school day, and are not ready for the Kindergarten Program, may attend the Montessori Enrichment Program after their Children's House morning. Students bring their own cold lunch (milk and water provided) and will eat lunch together. After lunch, children may nap or non-nappers, after a short rest time; may work with familiar Montessori materials, engage in imaginative play, art projects, cooking, or other activities in the Montessori classroom.

Montessori Enrichment:

11:35 am: Children gather together to enjoy lunch. This is a time for us to focus on grace, courtesy, friendship and cooperation. Upon arrival to their room, the children wash their hands, and actively participate in preparing their lunch environment. The children set out their lunches and join together in a song of gratitude. After lunch is finished, the children clean up their tables and lunch area.

12:10 pm: Children can continue their exploration of familiar Montessori materials. There is the opportunity for additional lessons and enrichment materials during this time.

12:45-1:30 pm: The youngest children who need to nap lay on nap mats and rest. During this time the lights are dimmed and gentle music is playing. Teachers sit quietly with the children.

1:30-3:00 pm: Children who do not fall asleep work with classroom materials and receive lessons.

3:00 pm: Weather permitting the children and caregivers spend time on the outdoor playground.

3:15 -3:30: Dismissal time for those children not staying for After Care.

After Care:

3:30 pm: After Care begins. Children eat snack (provided from home). Time is spent indoors and outside on a variety of activities and free play.

Kindergarten Program (Extension of the Morning Program)

Children's House students who will be five years old before September 1st are eligible for our Kindergarten Program. Readiness is recommended by your child's teacher, Director of Education and the Head of School. Each morning at 11:30 , after their morning Children's House class and recess, Kindergarteners come together to eat lunch and then spend their afternoons together in the Kindergarten classroom. Children in this program are provided extended opportunities to continue and build upon their Montessori experience from the morning Children's House class. This program offers students academic challenges within a whole group experience, as well as, the opportunity for the sustained independent work that is the core of the Montessori Method. Children in the Kindergarten Program will also have special classes available. These classes include additional Spanish instruction weekly, Mindfulness, and Physical Education.

Developmental Guidelines for Graduating Kindergarteners

Below is an overview of the developmental guidelines for children 5-6 years old at Rock Prairie Montessori School. The skills listed under each category are what we find to be essential skills to enter into first grade. It should be noted that each child will progress through the school year at a different pace. It is our goal to assist each child with academic and social development so that they will experience success.

Art, Music & Physical Development:

Each student is encouraged through a thoughtfully prepared environment for daily experiences in art, music and gross motor activities.

Science:

Encourages interest and discovery. Demonstrates knowledge of information and concepts presented in science units:

- Environmental Science – respect for the outdoor environment and active stewardship of the earth
- Earth Science – study of geography (map-making), geology, and the solar system
- Physical Science – the movement of matter, sound, heat and light

- Human Body – the senses, growing and changing, healthy eating and lifestyle
- History – introduction to time, (clock, days of the week, months, seasons) as well as history.

Sensorial:

The student will work with materials that engage the five senses. These materials provide experiences leading to the investigative process and logical thinking. Sensorial experiences lay the foundation for future math concepts.

Math:

Montessori math uses beautifully designed materials to give children concrete experiences that allow them to develop increasingly abstract understandings of mathematical, algebraic and geometric concepts.

Uses Montessori materials to:

- Recognize, represent and write quantities and numerals through the thousands place value
- Exchange equivalent quantities (10 units for one ten, etc)
- Find combinations of the numbers with sums through 10
- Explain teen numbers (16 = 1 ten and 6 units)
- Explain ten numbers (47 = 4 tens and 7 units)
- Skip count by 2 (to 20), 5 (to 50) and 10 (to 100)
- Become familiar with addition, subtraction and multiplication with manipulatives
- Recognize and name geometric shapes
- Sort and grade objects by length, width, weight, etc.
- Collect and organize simple data into charts and graphs
- Recognize, duplicate and create patterns

Language Arts:

Language Arts embodies the development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Rich language development is integrated throughout the entire classroom curriculum.

Uses Montessori materials to:

- Recognize letters of the alphabet by name (upper and lower case)
- Identify letter sounds
- Distinguish initial, medial and final sounds
- Write upper and lower case letters properly, general awareness of form, placement on the line and proper spacing of the letters
- Write first and last name
- Use letters and phonetically spells words to write about experiences, stories, people, objects or events
- Recognize basic sight words
- Become familiar with parts of a book (title, author, illustrator)

- Use pictures and context to make predictions and retell a story
- Is able to listen to a story and retell content
- Demonstrates proficient speaking and listening skills

Kindergarten Spanish Language Curriculum

Kindergarten level RPMS students begin a more formal Spanish Language class. The Spanish program at RPMS utilizes traditional Montessori materials and methods in conjunction with a TPR (Total Physical Response) foreign language teaching program named Muy Bien. The class is conducted primarily in Spanish, with the only English being provided a word at a time for understanding instructions or expectations. With this model, children are absorbing many questions and becoming familiar with hundreds of new vocabulary words. Children actively participate through manipulation of materials, including models and cards. Many common Montessori lessons are included, in addition to the Muy Bien program. This includes Montessori sensorial, mathematics, and geography concepts. We utilize multi-age grouping and frequently review past material to further cement nomenclature.

RPMS Kindergarten Spanish Curriculum Topic List

Format: 1- 30 minute lesson period per week

Emphasis on comprehension, conversation, word recognition and nomenclature

Teacher Created Curriculum:

- Introductions, greetings
- Expression of feelings, well being
- Weather
- Colors
- Numbers to 20
- Qualities of size, length with parallels to Montessori Sensorial Materials

Muy Bien A Spanish for Second Language Learners:

- Natural, spiral approach
- Total physical response
- Immersion with picture cards
- Written work that corresponds to topics:
 - Greetings
 - Colors
 - Numbers
 - Shapes
 - School materials
 - Family
 - Face and body
 - Home
 - Clothing
 - Food
 - Farm animals

- Grammar Concepts introduced in natural approach:
 - question/ answer structures
 - singular and plural categorization
 - Masculine and feminine word categorization
 - Usage of 3rd person sentence structure
 - Command word/ response