back together

with
Mountaineer Montessori School

2020-21 RE-ENTRY HANDBOOK
Dear MMS Families,

Back to school is always a time of great anticipation for students, teachers and parents. The beginning of this school year will be even more momentous and meaningful for all of us.

MMS has dedicated the past months to creating the foundation for a safe, strong and successful school year in the face of challenge. This handbook, “Back Together,” outlines the significant investments we have made in facilities enhancements as well as new protocols and policies to support learning in a new dynamic.

While things may be different, we know they can still be amazing for your child and we are absolutely determined to provide a wonderful educational experience for your family.

Embracing obstacles as opportunities requires us to stretch beyond our comfort zones. But if any community can do it well, it’s ours. Montessori education nurtures the very skills that our school – and our world – need now more than ever: problem solving, imagination, innovation, resiliency, flexibility, creativity and empathy. If you’re a part of our community, we know you already have these qualities inside of you.

Many of our new procedures were introduced during Campessori, the MMS summer program. The most surprising observation from these nine weeks was that there were few surprises. Children transitioned well and thrived within the restructured Campessori, giving us confidence and insight for roll out in the upcoming school year. As Maria Montessori said, “follow the child.”

“Back Together” is a living document. We will expand, revise and update this handbook to meet changing conditions and new directives, as well as to provide further guidance as required. Now, more than ever, your patience and partnership will be essential for a successful year.

Founded in 1976, MMS has built a proud tradition of excellence and innovation in education, continually evolving and growing to elevate our programs and community. If the past is any indication, and with your support, I have every confidence that we will continue to raise the bar in the year ahead.

Welcome back!

Jennifer
Returning to school is going to look and feel different for everyone this year. The outbreak of COVID-19 in March has caused all of us to think and do things in new ways. At MMS, that meant transitioning to remote learning within days for the final 11 weeks of school. Our community—students, teachers and parents—rose to the challenge, learning and discovering together.

Since then, we have worked continually to prepare for our 44th year at MMS. Our administration, staff, Board of Directors and Re-entry Task Force have consulted with state and local health departments, participated in webinars and other educational activities, connected with Montessori and private school professional organizations; and continually researched the latest recommendations and best practices to put together a blueprint for the year ahead.

Preparing for and presenting our Campessori Summer Program has given us three months of invaluable hands on experience, insight and feedback on implementing new health protocols and procedures. This work provides the foundation for “Back Together,” the MMS re-entry handbook. Our work is fact-based and all decisions have and will be made to align with four guiding principles:

- Safety
- Montessori learning
- Family partnerships
- Constant and ongoing monitoring

Earlier this summer, the task force released the 2020–21 scenario grid, which outlined how learning will happen under various scenarios. A copy of this grid is available on page four.

“Back Together” focuses on scenario plan A, classroom learning five days a week for all students. Our overarching goal is in classroom instruction for as many days as possible for as many students as possible.

This re-entry document is a starting, not a finishing, point, for our 2020–21 policies and procedures. Additional guidelines will continue to be developed and individual teachers may offer more specific guidance for their classes. Our policies will be adjusted to reflect latest developments with respect to the pandemic, government directives, new recommendations from the CDC and other authorities, and our own experience administering new policies and procedures.

Our community’s health and safety is of the utmost importance. The Board of Directors and the MMS Leadership Team are working together to provide learning continuity for your child, and to provide a strong and safe community for your entire family. We thank you in advance for your understanding and patience in the weeks and months ahead.
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"education is a work of self-organization by which man adapts himself to the conditions of life." Maria Montessori
MMS takes great pride in implementing many extraordinary changes to support physical distancing and the best practices for schools to reopen safely. There are few, if any, schools taking comparable measures to create safe learning environments for their students and staff while providing high quality education.

The biggest change to support physical distancing is the creation of a second campus, housed in the former St. Agnes School buildings and grounds, located at 4801 Staunton Avenue SE. Securing a new facility was the linchpin for 2020-21 back to school planning and a long time goal of our strategic plan.

With the addition of the Staunton Avenue buildings, classroom space will be doubled for every student. This will allow for physical distancing of students working in the classroom, as class sizes will effectively be cut in half. Lead guides and assistants will toggle between groups and classroom spaces throughout the day so that all children receive lessons from the lead guide and time for independent work with guidance of the assistant as needed.

This year, our Upper Elementary and Middle School classrooms will be located at the Staunton Avenue campus. Primary and Lower Elementary will remain at the 20th Street location. All classrooms will be assigned to a space that is two times or more the size of previous classrooms.

**Classrooms will be assigned and square footage (approximate) increased as follows:**

Primary I will be located in the current Primary building, spreading out into both halves of the building. 700 to 1,400 square feet.

Primary II will relocate to the brick building and will spread out into the current Plus room and the current Lower Elementary II room. 700 to 1,400 square feet.

Lower Elementary I will spread out into the art room, in addition to its current room. 594 to 1,210 square feet.

Lower Elementary II will move to the current Upper Elementary I and Upper Elementary II rooms. 616 to 1,232 square feet.

Upper Elementary I will move into two former daycare rooms (now joined to create one large room) at the Staunton Avenue campus. 616 to 1,344 square feet.

Upper Elementary II will move into the former library at the Staunton Avenue campus. 616 to 1,386 square feet.

The Middle School will move into the former cafeteria and adjoining/adjacent classrooms at the Staunton Avenue campus. 1,725 to 3,487 square feet.

**Parents will receive a virtual tour of these new facilities prior to the start of the school year.**
Campus adaptations:

To further support physical distancing and enhance the health and safety of our school community, MMS is making a number of adaptations to our campus.

These include (and are not limited to):

- Establishing directional traffic patterns into, out of and throughout all campus buildings.
- Re-designing our specials (art, music, Spanish, etc.) schedules.
- Adding portable sinks to some classrooms.
- Ordering additional materials and furniture.
- Spacing individual work spaces in classrooms.
- Restricting occupancy in meeting spaces.
- Securing additional screens for windows and doors for circulation.
- Implementing HVAC and other air quality improvements.

“if education is to be conceived along the same antiquated lines of a mere transmission of knowledge there is little to be hoped from it in the bettering of man’s future.”

maria montessori
PPE

We view the use of cloth face coverings as an important way that we, as a community, can slow/stop the spread of the virus and protect each other. Masks will be worn by all students and staff indoors. Students and staff will also use masks outdoors when physical distancing may not be possible. Our mask policy may be adjusted in the future based upon updated health guidelines and/or classroom experience. Please contact our office if your child has a medical diagnosis that is incompatible with wearing a mask. Further guidance regarding PPE will be shared during back to school sessions.

Staff will use gloves for cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing.

Indoor Shoes

Students and staff at all levels will be asked to change into “indoor shoes” upon arrival to school. For safety, indoor footwear must have treaded soles. Traditional bedroom slippers, flip flops, etc. are not appropriate. Classroom teachers will offer additional guidance.

Hygiene

Each year, MMS staff participate in safety training as part of their back to school preparations. Thorough training on best practices for safe classrooms will be a part of this year’s expanded professional development, with additional sessions to be held throughout the year as new information and recommendations are issued.

Students will be given lessons on effective hand washing technique. Hand washing will occur (at a minimum) upon entrance to school, before using a new lesson/material, before and after snack and lunch, and after playground time.

Students will be given lessons on cough and sneeze etiquette.

Cleaning, sanitizing and disinfecting

Enhanced sanitizing and cleaning processes are being implemented at each campus. MMS has purchased new, specialized misting equipment that effectively sanitizes surfaces and surrounding areas. This equipment will be used in classrooms, restrooms and on outdoor playground equipment throughout the school day. Staff dedicated to materials and building maintenance will follow of daily schedule to manage the new cleaning protocols.

Hand sanitizer, as well as soap and water, will be available in each classroom and in stations located through the building at restrooms, sinks and at main entrances.
Portable sinks will be added to all classrooms currently without a sink.

Each classroom will be furnished with a disinfectant spray that adults will use to wipe tables, chairs, handles, counters, and other high-touch hard surfaces routinely throughout the day.

Restrooms are cleaned, sanitized, and disinfected multiple times throughout the school day using EPA, OSHA and CDC-recommended products.

High touch playground equipment will be cleaned, sanitized, and disinfected throughout the school day.

MMS has ordered additional materials (individual work rugs, individual art kits, Montessori materials, etc.) and will also work with children to create materials in order to minimize the sharing of frequently-used items in the classrooms. Procedures will be in place to identify materials to be cleaned/sanitized before the next use.

**Lunches and snacks**

Students will be eating in their classrooms or outside, observing distancing guidelines. Each student will bring a lunch and water bottle for their use only. Water fountains will be closed, except for the water bottle filler feature. All students will have the ability to re-fill their water bottles during the day.

MMS has always had a BYO-lunch policy at all levels, and that continues at this time. Care should be taken by all students and staff to avoid bringing items that need refrigeration or microwaving, as these appliances are strictly off-limits. Young students will benefit from practice at home in how to open the boxes, containers and thermoses that contain their lunch.

**Outdoor time**

Our aim is to provide multiple opportunities each day for students to have time outdoors. Outdoor times will offer fresh air breaks, outdoor lunches, nature-based/garden work, learning activities, and free time. These times will be woven into the schedule of each class. Classes will not mix together outdoors. Each class will have its own time on the play equipment. Playground surfaces will be cleaned during the day. Masks will be worn outdoors when physical distancing is not possible.

**Transportation**

Due to our split campus and to support social distancing, there will be a longer, and staggered schedule, for drop-off and pick-up.

20th Street Campus (Primary and Lower Elementary)
Arrival: 7:50-8:15 p.m.
Morning Friend Dismissal: 11:50 a.m.-12:05 p.m.
Afternoon Dismissal: 2:50-3:10 p.m.

Staunton Avenue Campus (Upper Elementary and Middle School)
Arrival: 8:00-8:20 a.m.
Dismissal: 3:00-3:20 p.m.

An instructional video demonstrating arrival and dismissal procedures will be sent to parents in August. Families will conduct a health check of each child prior to disembarking from vehicles on campus. Signs outlining the self check questionnaire will visible at our drop off locations. MMS staff will conduct additional health screens of each child, including temperature checks, before they will be admitted to school.

Families are expected to adhere to the arrival and dismissal schedule, as late arrivals and pick-ups will be highly disruptive and take our staff away from the important work of running the school.
Health screening upon arrival to school each day:

- Self-monitoring of symptoms and an attestation will be required of all adults and students (some with the help of their parents) who come onto campus.
- Student and staff temperatures will be taken at arrival.
- Students and staff will use hand sanitizer before entering the school buildings.
- Faculty and administration will be monitoring for symptoms.
- Each campus will have a safe space where a symptomatic adult or student may wait and be monitored before they return home.

Plus Program

In order to minimize mixing students across classrooms, we need to make changes to our Plus Program. Primary children staying for Plus from 11:50 a.m. – 2:50 p.m. will remain in their classroom space and Plus staff will come to them. Our after school Plus Program, which typically runs from 2:50-5:30 p.m., will be available with revised hours starting October 1. Final Plus pickup for Primary and Lower Elementary students will be 5:00 p.m. Final Plus pickup for Upper Elementary and Middle School students will be 5:15 p.m. We are investigating the safest way to administer our Plus Program and we will send more details once decisions are finalized.

Field trips

Students will not participate in field trips (overnight or day trips) until further notice.

Travel

Any student or employee returning to Charleston from a destination under travel restrictions, or whose household member has returned from such a destination, will be asked to stay home for 14 calendar days prior to returning to school.

Volunteering and visitors

In order to minimize risk and maintain a healthy environment for our students and teachers, we will begin the school year by strictly limiting access to campus buildings to students, teachers and essential personnel. While we understand that some members of our community may be disappointed, it is important to note that we will not resume on-campus or in-classroom volunteer opportunities right away.

“the child is both a hope and a promise for mankind.”

maria montessori
Prepare for interruptions

Even putting forth our best efforts, there remain circumstances beyond our control. We anticipate, based on CDC predictions, possible outbreaks of COVID-19 which could possibly impact on-campus programming in the future. In the event we are notified by government officials or the health department of the need to close campus, school will continue remotely. In addition, we are asking all families and employees to be flexible regarding the school calendar.

Our commitment

This plan is based on in-classroom, on-campus education five days a week for all students.

In the event of mandated school closures, MMS may shift to operating as a critical care site (MMS Scenario B) to the extent it is allowed by state and local authorities. MMS is a licensed child care provider for children through age 13, and our summer program has run successfully under this licensure. Should circumstances require us to operate under this model, we would offer remote learning to Middle School students while pursuing a waiver to continuing serving seventh and eighth-year students on campus.

In the event that we are required to limit or restrict access to campus, or parts of campus (for example, to restrict access for just one program level), MMS will transition to remote learning. We recognize the needs of young children include the requirement of supervision and care in addition to their learning. In the event campus operations must be modified, we will prioritize continuing to offer on-campus instruction for our youngest students.

We are currently examining feedback on last spring’s remote learning experience and re-designing/augmenting our remote learning plan for the 2020-21 school year. Families will receive details about remote learning by August 25.

Regardless of the setting—on campus or remotely—MMS is committed to full year of Montessori education for our students. MMS funds teacher salaries, program expenses and fixed costs through tuition. In accordance with our policies and the parent enrollment agreement, tuition will due through the end of the year. Should our Primary program be required to shift to remote learning for more than 14 consecutive calendar days, adjustments for Primary tuition payments may be considered. Please contact the office if you have any questions.

Learning at home

MMS provides a hands-on, experiential education with teaching and learning experiences on campus. While we understand the on-campus experience is the most suitable approach for the majority of our students, we also recognize that some families may not be able to have their children return to campus for reasons related to the virus. Please contact us if returning to school, even with the safety measures we have in place, is a concern for you.
MMS is not just a school, it’s a community of children, teachers, parents and friends connected by our commitment to education and each other. Our interrelationships have never been more critical as we navigate a global pandemic together. Mitigating the risk of the spread of the virus and maintaining a safe environment inside our school relies on all of us to do our part outside of school.

At MMS, children learn to care for themselves, each other, the school environment, their community and our world. They develop appreciation of the impact of their decisions on others and the skills to act and interact with respect and empathy. They begin to see their place in the larger society and the role they can play in creating a better world.

These lessons will take on critical importance in the year ahead. Creating and maintaining a healthy campus environment will require the commitment and participation of our entire school community—students, teachers and families. **MMS will adhere to strict safeguards on campus and we expect a comparable level of diligence by our families outside of school.** Individual decisions can affect our entire school community, some of whom are essential health care workers, have pre-existing medical conditions, and/or are older.

We implore all of you to follow the health and safety guidelines as laid out by health professionals worldwide:

- Restrict your family’s exposure to large crowds.
- Practice physical distancing and wear a mask in public.
- Teach your children the importance of thorough hand washing.
- Do not bring students to campus if they have been exposed to anyone who has COVID-19 or is exhibiting symptoms.
- Take the school’s self-screening protocol seriously.
- Be patient at arrivals when we are checking temperatures and allowing for entry at a safe distance between students.
- Follow CDC recommendations regarding travel and self-quarantine when returning from travel.
- Report any information to the school that will assist us in maintaining a safe environment.
- Be flexible—our plans may change as the situation with the virus changes.
- Look for updates to this plan on the MMS website regularly and watch for ongoing announcements from MMS administration, board and teachers.
Families can prepare for a safe back to school today by:

- Encouraging frequent hand washing and use of hand sanitizer.
- Practicing coughing and sneezing into elbows.
- Adding daily temperature checks to your morning routine.
- Making sure either your child can unbuckle her/himself from the car seat or seat belt, or that you can reach to unbuckle your child from your seat. For safety reasons, we will open car doors at arrival, but we will not reach into cars to unbuckle children, retrieve bags, etc.
- Visually showing and practicing keeping six feet apart.
- Following social distancing recommendations as a family.
- Practicing wearing a cloth face covering.
- Encouraging physical activity and time outside.
- Asking how others are feeling and give them space to share and ask questions.
- Learning and understanding when to keep your children home. Parents agreeing and knowing when to keep children out of school is critical to creating a health school environment for all.

Community education

MMS staff worked hard to deliver academic continuity this spring, and they continued to invest significant time in professional development this summer.

Likewise, we plan to offer parent education opportunities to help our community build a strong partnership between guide/teacher, parent and student regardless of where learning takes place. Numerous Parent University opportunities were presented virtually last spring to give parents important information and tools for supporting their child, and these programs will continue this year.

Parent education and involvement has always been an important component of our total education experience. The Montessori approach differs from traditional education in many key areas, and giving parents insight into the philosophy and method can help them optimize their child’s academic progress. **This year, parent education takes on an even greater importance and participation will be expected.**

Stay in touch

Parents should anticipate frequent updates from the MMS office, classroom teachers and the Board of Directors.

These communications may be sent via email, posted on our website, shared on social media and/or hosted on RebWeb. **It is the responsibility of parents to watch for and read announcements in a timely manner.** We anticipate ongoing public health updates that may impact our school. Parents will be expected to be aware of and respond to these directives. As always, please contact the MMS office right away if you have questions about a particular announcement or regarding other matters.
MMS will follow the protocols established by state and/or county public health departments should there be a case of COVID-19 in our school community. These guidelines may continue to evolve, but our commitment to safety and health is unwavering. Be assured that health and safety of our students, teachers and families will take precedence over any other considerations.

Again, we emphasize our direction to all members of our school community to strictly follow health and safety guidelines inside and outside of school to minimize risk and possible disruptions.

What happens happens when someone gets sick

MMS will consult with public health authorities to determine the broader implications of a positive COVID-19 test or exposure among students or teachers for classrooms and our school. These policies and guidelines continue to evolve and more details will be provided as they are available. The matrix below outlines our current policy for individuals:

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<th>INDIVIDUAL HEALTH STATUS</th>
<th>OUT OF SCHOOL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Primary exposure to COVID-19-no symptoms</td>
<td>Home for 14 days since exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis of COVID-19 no symptoms</td>
<td>Home for 10 days since first positive COVID-19 test</td>
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<tr>
<td>At least 1 new symptom (even non-COVID related):</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Fever of 100.4+</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Chills</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ Shortness of breath/breathing difficulty</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ New cough</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Home until:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ 10 days since first symptoms</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ No fever for 3 days (without fever medicine)</td>
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<tr>
<td>☐ 3 days of symptom improvement, including coughing and shortness of breath</td>
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MMS 2020-2021 Calendar Highlights

September 4: New student visits (signup details will be sent by August 28)

September 8: First day for students – Primary Extended Day, Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, and Middle School (early dismissal – half day)

September 9: First day for students – Returning Primary Morning Friends (early dismissal – half day)

September 10: First day for students – New Primary Morning Friends (early dismissal – half day)

September 11: First full day of classes – Plus Program for three- and four-year-olds begins

October 1: First day for after-school Plus Program (tentative)

October 30: School closed/Professional development day

November 25–27: School closed/Thanksgiving break

December 23: Noon dismissal

December 24-January 1: School closed/New Year’s break

January 18: School closed/Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

February 15: School closed/President’s Day

April 5-9: School closed/Spring Break

May 31: School closed/Memorial Day

June 11: Last day of school/early dismissal

Parent conferences will be scheduled in late October/early November and again in March. Conferences will be held via Zoom over the course of several afternoons. School will remain open on conference days. Parent education sessions will be presented virtually throughout the year –

All dates are subject to revision, and we will inform you right away if changes are needed.