

MCHD offers your child nine years of an expansive and progressive curriculum in an environment that is . . .

safe and caring
exciting and challenging
nationally accredited
dedicated to educating
the whole child: mind,
body and spirit.

For over 25 years, MCHD has kept its focus on your child's important first school years. We know that the most vital factor in life-long learning is a strong sense of self. In our classrooms, your child is guided to make responsible choices, judge himself well, work cooperatively, and believe in his own power to pursue knowledge, driven by joy and curiosity.



We hope you will stay with MCHD throughout the nine-year cycle, from age 3 through 12. There is no finer gift to a child than the gift of independence. There are few finer joys in life than the joy of discovery.



Jim Coleman, Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of the Practice of Law, Duke Law School, says:

“The academic foundation our two children have gotten here at MCHD has been extraordinary: Among other things, our five year old--who is completing MCHD's first three-year cycle--is reading, doing multiplication, and is engrossed in the natural sciences. Our nine year old--who has progressed through MCHD's first two cycles and has just begun the third--is doing triple digit division, fractions, and factoring, and is reading J.R.R. Tolkien and Brian Jacques. Most wonderful is that they are both thoroughly engaged and enthusiastic about all of their work!

We credit this to MCHD's special and unfailing commitment throughout the curriculum and nine-year program to Maria Montessori's developmental philosophy, teaching methodology, and materials, all of which combine to assure within a formal structure that children learn and absorb all that their potential allows, and conversely, that they are not disabled from reaching that potential by standard expectations.

While this foundation is itself invaluable, undoubtedly we are also committed to the fact that MCHD envelops them throughout their development in a warm and loving community, which reinforces daily the essential values of care and respect for each other, the natural environment, and the world at large.”

Creative Writing

Children love listening to and telling stories. Our Extended Day curriculum builds out of this natural interest. There are two components of this process: 1) the actual story telling (fiction, fantasy, or non-fiction), and 2) the mechanics of spelling and handwriting.

MCHD hopes to have the children begin to develop a sense of themselves as writers. To that end, we work on story telling at group time, drawing story ideas and, later, journal writing. Children participate in writing conferences with the teacher. Simultaneously the child is working on the mechanics of spelling and handwriting through a specific sequence of lessons.

Work Plans

We use a special observation/record keeping/planning sheet for the Extended Day child. The teacher records the children's work, as well as their behaviors and moods, on this sheet.

After observing the children and watching their work, the teacher plans lessons and “assignments” for the week ahead. The assignments are not absolute. The teacher has the flexibility to alter the work plan based on her observations of the child. The children are usually eager to know what is on their work plan, frequently requesting that certain work be “assigned”!

Extended Day versus Traditional Kindergarten

MCHD is a nine-year school, serving students through grade six. While most of our families do stay for the Extended Day and Elementary years, some are unable to do so. We recognize that Montessori elementary will not always be an option, but we urge preschool parents to learn as much as they can about our Extended Day year before making a decision to leave MCHD.

Extended Day is a rich, full and advanced experience that builds on the previous two years naturally and provides students with a wonderful foundation for future learning. Students have the opportunity to model leadership and explore a full range of material in the mornings, and to work in an intimate and respectful setting in the afternoons. Their achievements in self-knowledge and self-direction and their sense of self in community are established during this senior year of preschool.

Parents are encouraged to observe their children in class, obtain literature on the advantages of the three-year cycle, and talk often with their teachers when making a decision about Extended Day.



Special Needs/Tutoring

Although MCHD does not have trained staff for special needs, we work closely with outside agencies and therapists to accommodate tutoring into the class day either on or off site, and to adapt lessons and assignments to the special needs of the child whenever possible.

Readiness for Lower Elementary

Students are assessed early during the third year for their readiness for Lower Elementary. It is sometimes appropriate to give a student an extra year in Extended Day to become more secure in the continuum of studies, or, as is more usually the case, to gain an advantage in maturity. Teachers and parents work closely together to determine if this is to be recommended.

Art

Art activities for the children cover a broad range of skills and fundamentals that have applications across the curriculum, including:

*drawing with crayons,
pencils, pastels,
markers and chalk
designs and
pattern-making
glueing and cutting
painting with water
paints, tempura
mixing color: primary
and secondary
playdough and clay
holiday projects
early sewing*



Our classrooms are aesthetically pleasing, and activities in every area are designed with an eye on beauty and harmony.

Music

Music is generally a group activity, either as singing at circle time, listening to music, or moving to music. Independent activities with the bells include tone discrimination and composition. Students build an extensive song vocabulary (both serious and fun) as teachers use music to reflect and expand various classroom studies, seasons, or cultural events.

Spanish

Preschool students have a Spanish lesson each week in small groups by ability/age level. The focus at this age is on the appreciation for other languages and building a small, functional vocabulary in Spanish. Songs, games and hands-on activities are integrated into these lessons.

The Role of Computers and Television

There are no video screens, computers, or electronic games in any of our preschool classrooms. The classrooms are rich with hands-on materials that are engaging and interactive with the full range of academic materials available without electronics. We urge parents to limit exposure to video screens at home as well, in favor of activities that are personally engaging and/or family oriented.

EXTENDED DAY CLASS (Kindergarten)

The core of the Extended Day curriculum has two parts: the Montessori math sequences and the creative writing process. In addition, there may be movement activities, foreign language, art projects, reinforcements or extensions of science and geography activities and occasional field trips.

Extended Day children are still very fully a part of the three-to-six classroom. Over the course of their day they use the full range of materials: pouring, scrubbing, building, painting, and experimenting. They are not held to a strictly academic day.

Mathematics

In Extended Day, Montessori math is presented as a series of group lessons, beginning with review of numeral recognition and progressing through linear counting, the decimal system, and operations (addition, then multiplication, then subtraction and, finally, division).

Because the Extended Day groups are small, the teacher can give each child a job or turn during the group lesson. Individual follow-up lessons and reinforcements during work periods are an important component. By the time the children leave to begin their elementary years, they have laid a strong foundation from which to venture into abstraction.



Children of three to six learn best by exploring and discovering, absorbing knowledge through their hands and senses. They concentrate best when there is routine, beauty, and freedom within order. Our classrooms are designed for them to make choices and work without interruption, with a rich array of materials for their exploration.

The School Day

At this age, consistency of the day is extremely important. We establish and preserve a routine in each classroom: a morning circle with songs, a new lesson, an extended work period with individual lessons, group story-reading at the end of the morning, and outdoor play.

Changes to the routine are planned carefully and the children are prepared in advance when special presentations, celebrations, or cultural events are enjoyed.

Ground Rules / Discipline

The teacher models and guides the students to internalize the basic ground rules of respect for each other, for their environment, and for themselves. Discipline in most cases involves a positive reminder of the ground rules and separation of the child from a

situation until he or she makes the choice to return with a change in behavior. This positive approach--clear and uncomplicated--helps students internalize a sense of community behavior that makes the classroom a safe and happy place in which to work.

Student Choice/Teacher Direction

The teacher in the preschool classroom gives lessons, observes, and facilitates. She gives guidance to the child's personal explorations by preparing the environment carefully, re-directing when necessary, and learning what each child needs in order to move forward.

The child is given the opportunity to make personal choices and work without interruption, and may choose to work alone or with others. The teacher offers new lessons to individuals as they demonstrate that they are ready, re-directing students gently when their choices are not appropriate, and keeping records of each child's progress.

Students may choose to repeat an activity without interference, and may remain with the work as long as they wish. In most cases there is only one of each activity, so students must learn patience and respect as others work.

Evaluation, Testing and Grades

At this age, evaluation is by observation of the student at work. Because the learning material is concrete and incrementally staged for cognitive development, the teacher can observe the student's level of mastery and determine next steps for the child quite easily. The teacher has an extensive set of lesson plans for this purpose.

We definitely share the child's joy in successes, although we refrain from giving overt praise to the child or external incentives such as grades or stickers. Children naturally have the desire to master skills and progress to new challenges, with an internal ability to acknowledge success. Work in the preschool is process, not product, so little concrete evidence of activity goes home at the end of the school day. The most productive way for parents to see their child's progress in school is to observe in class. Two parent-teacher conferences are held during the year for a synopsis of each child's interests, accomplishments, and areas for growth.

Curriculum Overview

The preschool classroom has an extensive curriculum unique to Montessori schools. Based on her scientific observations of children and their development, Maria Montessori identified growth patterns for this age. She created beautiful materials to directly meet the needs of children. Many of these materials develop the senses, a primary means of learning. Others help the child build independence in his or her physical world--independence in self-care, care of the daily environment, dressing, etc. Still others meet the child's early language development needs with clear and progressive hands-on work, or the need to understand number and classification with materials of mathematically precise design.

Areas of the classroom are defined for each subject, and materials are placed on the shelves in an intentional sequence. Most activities are designed for independent exploration, many with self-correction built into the materials to promote uninterrupted learning.

The Extended Day (kindergarten) curriculum is outlined on the last pages of this pamphlet. Extended Day students access all preschool lessons and materials during the morning. The afternoon Extended Day class focusses primarily on the areas of math, reading and writing, but is not limited to these.

Practical Life

Practical Life is the foundation of the Montessori curriculum. In this area the children practice and experiment using materials from everyday "practical" life, engaging in happy use of tools from the kitchen or workshop. The children learn and refine many particular skills which allow them to operate independently as they move through their day, even after they leave the classroom. More importantly, through their joyful work, their concentration and sense of order expand and deepen. They develop a basic independence and self-confidence.

Work in the Practical Life area refines eye-hand coordination, promotes a lengthened concentration span, and develops the child's sense of order. The child becomes more independent in the world.



Sensorial

Children possess the innate human inclination to notice, explore, describe, make use of and appreciate this wonderful world. The sensorial materials help to develop this capacity for observation. They isolate a single quality and open a window for the children to experience relationships and sequences using all of their senses.

In this area are puzzles, pegs, various pattern activities, and plane and solid geometric shapes. There are materials to refine building and balance skills, and experiences to highlight the senses of taste, hearing and smell.

Many of the sensorial activities provide an indirect preparation for Math. These materials provide experience in noting similarities and differences, patterns, making sets, and logical thinking.

Mathematics

With the unique Montessori math materials, children develop--quite early--an innate, tangible sense of numbers and the ways in which people use them.

Math is a very individualized subject in preschool. There are many materials, arranged in sequence with associated lesson plans, which teachers progress through with each child. Math study at this age is in four main areas of knowledge:

- 1-10 skills
- Decimal system
- Linear counting
- Operations

Concrete materials are used at this level to form a strong foundation of mathematical knowledge. It is essential to this age that abstraction is not rushed, giving students many opportunities to internalize concepts through work with real quantities and sensorial experiences.



Language

The Montessori classroom is rich in vocabulary and expressive language. There is a carefully designed, phonetically-based sequence of lessons to teach spelling, reading and writing. Language is a primary key to the world for children. Our Montessori preschool classrooms focus on developing enriched vocabulary, knowledge of the alphabet's sounds, the formation of words with letters, and persuasive and respectful expressive language.

Pre-reading activities are begun when a child shows readiness, and work is individualized. Materials are sequenced through a great number of activities in sound recognition of letters, matching of objects or pictures with sounds, matching of pictures with sounds, rhyming cards, and more. Older students begin to blend sounds and work with a movable alphabet to write words and sentences. Parallel activities with developing fine motor control for handwriting are ongoing. Reading naturally follows phonetic awareness and early writing as students read back their work and become aware of the power of blending sounds. A staged reading sequence supports the student's reading progress.

Science

In the science area, students look at things. They learn the important scientific skill of observation by using materials which highlight various categories: living/non-living, animal/plant, vertebrate/invertebrate, and the five classes of vertebrates. Discussions of various topics and care for classroom animals and plants are important elements of the science area.

Geography

Children love the idea of places--near or far away. We introduce both physical and cultural geography:

Physical: the globe, the continents and oceans, land and water forms, and the four elements
Cultural: countries of the world, stories, customs, and celebrations of other peoples. We think about the strategies diverse peoples have evolved to meet their basic needs. "The purpose of the geography curriculum is to help the child achieve a reverence for the beauty of our world and the richness of its cultures, and to see his relationship to the earth, its resources, and use." Pat Pope