



Parent Handbook

Updated February 2022

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Part I Organization information

Our Mission

Secret Garden Montessori cultivates each child's ability to be a compassionate, critical thinker who is holistically prepared for the future.

Our Values



Community



Respect



Individualized & Experiential Learning



Self-reliance

Our History

The idea for Secret Garden germinated in 2006 with a group of parents seeking an alternative preschool experience for their children. They value wholesome food, a connection to nature and community. The group found a seasoned Montessori teacher, Barbette Robillard, who brought the group to the philosophy of Maria Montessori. The school began as a small, homeschool cooperative, rooted in the families' homes. Barbette moved around weekly to the homes and set up a travelling classroom which included practical life, work with didactic materials, art, outdoor experiences and lots of nature study. The school rapidly began to grow and in 2008 we established our first Board of Trustees. We rooted ourselves in Frenchtown in 2010 at our current location on Harrison Street. In keeping with our commitment to building community, we have conducted canned food & children's' coat drives and visits to local groups and nursing homes. We were granted permission to plant a community perennial garden adjacent to the playing fields on Old Frenchtown Field. We now also have an herb and vegetable garden outside of our classroom. As our school grows, we have expanded our programs to include Toddlers, Extended Day (Before/After) care and summer camp as well as hosting a number of specialty programs. Our garden continues to flourish and our roots are deepening each season!

Non-discrimination Policy Statement

Secret Garden Montessori follows federal guidelines and mandates regarding nondiscriminatory practices in student recruitment activities, awarding of scholarships, hiring of faculty and instructors and general employment practices.

Secret Garden Montessori admits students of any race, color, religion, gender, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, & activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, & athletic or other school-administered programs.

Further, it is the policy of Secret Garden Montessori to provide equal employment opportunity without unlawful discrimination based upon race, color, religion, age, gender, marital or family status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, ancestry, national origin, physical or mental handicap, membership in the United States uniformed military services or any other characteristic protected by law.

Governance and Administrative Structure

Secret Garden is a non-profit organization incorporated in the state of Pennsylvania and operating as a legal business entity & employer in the state of New Jersey. It is governed by a Board of Trustees made up of alumni parents, staff & community members. The Board is the guardian of the school's mission and is accountable for the financial well-being of the school. Our Board meetings are open and we encourage active participation and engagement with this important work.

Board of Trustees as of September 2021

Dawn Mansley- Board Chair

Jena Detore– Vice Chair

Josh Weicher– Treasurer

Hayley Weichler– Secretary

Rosalie Skakum, Barbette Robillard, Melissa Velez- Ex Officio

Community participation and Volunteer opportunities

We embrace a cooperative spirit at SGM and invite families to actively participate in their child's experience. If you have any special interest or talent you'd like to share with the class, we invite you to speak with the staff about scheduling an appropriate time for you to come in. ***Please note: During the period which we are following the Health and Safety Standards for COVID-19, Visitors are not permitted to enter the building. We will stay in communication with our families as soon as this restriction is lifted.**

There are many other ways to participate such as committee efforts, parent education, board meetings, fund-raising events, etc.

Practical Life

On occasion, you will be asked to send in various items we need for practical life work.

You will receive a notice that it is your turn to send in an item we need, such as apples, carrots, tooth paste or lemon oil. Your child will be thrilled to contribute to the class and take a proprietary interest in the week's polishing or apple cutting activities.

Laundry ***During the COVID Pandemic, Nap/rest Linens will be sent home daily to be washed by families. In the classroom, linens will be replaced with paper products to decrease the risk of infection.**

The children use towels, wash cloths, cloth napkins and aprons during their Practical Life exercises in the classroom. Parents will be asked to take the class laundry bag home to wash on a Friday and return the clean laundry back on Monday. If it is not convenient for parent to do laundry, they will be scheduled for another day.

Fundraising efforts

Throughout the year, SGM participates in a number of fundraising and community engagement activities through the work of our F.A.C.E (Fundraising and community engagement) committee. The proceeds from our fundraising efforts go towards both general operations and our scholarship funds. We rely on the generous contributions to make these efforts successful. There are many ways for families to get involved including committee membership, single event participation and/or chairing and, participation in events.

Part II School Rhythms and Routines

Maria Montessori called the years between ages 3 and 6 the "sensitive period for order". Consistency in the daily routine and your attitude toward it are vital to your child's feelings of security. Give your child plenty of time to get ready for school, the same amount every day. Don't rush! We don't want to associate hecticness and an accompanying sense of guilt with the school experience.

Establishing a happy pattern of beginning each morning with regular, predictable events preceding arrival at the school will help your child establish a positive attitude and enter the classroom eagerly, able to get the most out of every day.

A Glimpse Into Our Day

*Please see a full outline of our **revised drop off and pick up procedures** on the next page.

Primary Program Overview

8:30 - 9:00 am Morning drop-off
9:00 - 10:45 Morning work cycle
11:00- 11:45 Recess
11:45 Return to the school, half day students dismissed at 12
12:00-1:00 Lunch and Clean Up
1:00-1:30 Reading and Rest
1:30-2:30 Older Children Work Cycle #2
2:45-3:00pm Care of the Classroom
3:00 Dismissal to parents

Sprouts program overview

8:30 - 9:00 am Morning drop-off
9:00-9:45 Independent work guided by the teacher
9:45-10:20 Snack time
10:20-10:50 Morning Gathering
10:50– 11:45 Outdoor play
11:45 Return to the school, half day students dismissed at 12
12:00-12:30 Lunch
12:30-2:30 Rest
2:30-2:50 Quiet activities as students prepare for dismissal
3:00 Dismissal to parents

Extended Care Program

Please contact the office for Extended Care Availability

7:30-8:30 am Before care program: Children may be dropped off at the Primary vestibule doors.
3:00-5:30 pm After care: Children are dismissed to their parents at their scheduled pick up time

Daily Drop-off & Pick-up procedures

*Please note: During the period which we are following the Health and Safety Standards for COVID-19, we will be screening each child before entering the school each morning. The following procedure will allow for a smooth and safe transition into the building:

Please drive around the building past the Sprouts entrance up to the Primary Garden and shut off your car. This will allow us to communicate with ease. If you are second or third in line, please wait directly behind the car ahead of you. Staff will be waiting to greet you and will ask you to report your child's temperature. We will adhere to the following Health and Safety Guideline outlined by the Office of Licensing:

'Children and staff with a fever in excess of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, or exhibiting other symptoms of COVID-19, shall not be allowed to enter the facility, nor will persons that have exposure to persons known to have COVID-19 during the preceding 14 days.'

Once the screening is complete, you may help your children out of the car and they may walk independently into their classroom. **Please note that we are not permitted to allow anyone inside the building aside from children and staff at this time.** If you feel that this transition needs more of your time and attention, you may pull your vehicle around and into a parking space. When your child is ready, we will be there to welcome them in. **Staff will sign your child(ren) in for you through our Smartcare System.**

Upon entering, children will place their belongings in an assigned cubby and they will be invited into the classroom to wash their hands and join the Gathering.

Unplanned late arrivals

We understand that from time to time an unplanned late arrival may be unavoidable.

Parents arriving late (after 8:55am) should call the school directly. Rosalie will receive you at the time of arrival.

Planned Late arrival/Early dismissal

Please call the school in the event of a planned late arrival or early pick-up.

Attendance/Absence & Lateness

Please call the school to let us know if your child is going to be absent or arriving late for drop-off or pickup. If you are planning for your child to be away from school for an extended period of time, please let us know well in advance. ***During the period which we are following the Health and Safety Standards for COVID-19, we ask our families to please inform the office of any travel to high-risk states/countries. Your support in this will contribute to the general health of the community.**

Dismissal Procedures for 12:00pm and after 3:00pm

Parents picking up at 12:00 noon may pull around to the Primary Garden Drive Up Entrance. Your child will be brought directly out to your car. **At this time, staff will sign your child out for you through our Smartcare System. Please also see Policy on Release of children on page 17.**

Snack & Lunch

Snack *At this time, we request that parents send a mid-morning and afternoon snack (when applicable) in addition to a packed lunch. Families are permitted to donate food at the Teachers request ONLY.

Parents of the primary class supply snack on a weekly basis and the children prepare it (wash & cut vegetables, slice cheese, etc). The snack rotation is posted on the website calendar. SGM provides snack for the Sprouts class and summer camp.

We prefer to serve the same snack all week. Serving the same snack all week encourages the children to eat when and if they are hungry, and helps them learn how to prepare the snack: slicing an apple, for example, gets easier with practice! *We promote eating whole grains, organic fruits & vegetables.*

We must be advised about all food allergies during the registration process. Children requiring alternatives to the weekly snack should maintain a supply in the classroom so that they too can be engaged in preparing their own snacks. We can accommodate many allergies with our snack rotation.

Lunch

Children staying for the afternoon should bring a lunch box with a cold pack to keep items cold or a thermos container to keep food warm. If you boil some water and let it sit a few minutes before filling your thermos, the food will usually stay much warmer.

Please be aware that, whenever possible, we are happy to heat up lunches. HOWEVER, we are often unable to do so in the primary class because they typically have an outdoor picnic in nice weather.

There is no need to pack a drink, we'll always have water available. Please, if packing a beverage, send a thermos or water bottle instead of a juice box. Any uneaten food will be rewrapped and packed back into the lunchbox so you can see how much your child has eaten, and all trash will also travel home to emphasize our enthusiasm for reusable containers!

Encourage your child to pack his/her own lunch as a part of the morning or (even better & more relaxed) night-before-school routine. Children are more likely to eat what they prepare!

Leftovers from dinner the night before can be packed into a lunch-sized serving for the next day. Fresh fruits & vegetables are an excellent addition. Please leave candy and treats at home.

Please see also “Food and other Allergies” on page 12.

Birthdays

Children’s birthdays will be celebrated with a special circle time ceremony. It is not necessary to bring in treats for the occasion. Instead, we ask that you provide a set of photos for showing -- ideally a baby photo & one from each subsequent year. Sharing these really makes the day special!

Items for school

Clothing

When your child begins attending, please send a **pair of indoor slippers or shoes with a rubber sole**. These are to be left at school and changed into at the start of each day.

Your child also needs a **complete change of weather-appropriate clothing** to keep in their cubby box. Notes will be sent home when items need replacement seasonally or because of use. Children must have closed sturdy sneakers, sandals or boots for outdoor play. Crocs & flip flops are not ideal. Sizes should be checked by parents throughout the school year as the children do tend to grow out of them before we realize.

***During the period which we are following the Health and Safety Standards for COVID-19, please send all belongings for the day (lunch box, water bottle, sunscreen, etc.) in a larger backpack. This will allow for safe storage of personal belongings.**

Folders - Friday is "Backpack Day" During the School Year

Primary class only

When your child begins attending please provide 2 two pocket folders clearly marked with his/her name. One folder will be used for the child's finished work to go home on the last day of the week (typically Friday). It is then returned to school each Monday. The other folder will be a spare, kept at school. The folder will deliver any notices for snack, etc -- so please check it each week.

Other Items from Home

Please refrain from bringing stuffed animals, toys or other items from home. (Just say it's the school rule, let us be the bad guys!) These items have proved to be a distraction and a source of panic in the mornings, with kids scrambling to find something to bring to show their friends before leaving the house.

Books, music, items from nature or something of interest from a family trip would be welcome periodically through the year. A special call may go out for particular toys (sleds, bubbles, wheeled items like trikes & bikes) during a suitable week.

Naps

Children age 4 and under are required to have a rest period after lunch. If your child is staying all afternoon, please send a small blanket and a small pillow in a cloth bag for them. Each item should be clearly marked with child's name. **Please note that these items will be sent home daily to be washed. We will provide an assigned rest mat for your child to use.** The Sprouts and Multipurpose rooms serve as our rest area for both classes and a calming environment is created with dimmed lights, soft music and books and other quiet activities provided for children who do not fall asleep.

***During the period which we are following the Health and Safety Standards for COVID-19, spacing of groups may be reduced to six feet during nap or sleep periods, if necessary. Cots or bedding shall be positioned alternatively head-to-toe to minimize potential virus transmission between children.**

Observations

*Please note: During the period which we are following the Health and Safety Standards for COVID-19, Visitors are not permitted to enter the building. We will stay in communication with our families as soon as this restriction is lifted. Please contact the office to schedule your visit. Below are some useful guidelines for observing.

Guidelines for Observing in the Classroom

reprinted, with permission, from the website of Compass Montessori School,

Jefferson County, CO

We welcome observations, typically in the mornings after the children have settled into the routine of the new school year (4-6 weeks). We have a high regard for the children's classroom environment and take great care not to interrupt their concentration and focus. Observers are asked to stay seated in the classroom and try not to engage the children in conversation. A polite "hello" and a direct response would be appropriate if a child approaches to ask who you are and why you are visiting.

Here are some things to look for during observation. We will also give you a more detailed list of questions, and you may feel free to take notes and follow up with Barbette afterwards to talk about what you see!

Classroom Environment A great deal of effort and thought is devoted to the "prepared environment" of a Montessori classroom. Each piece of material has been placed on the shelf to help the child independently develop a particular skill. Students of different ages are intermingled so that they may help and learn from one another.

Degree of Self-Direction Notice that the students learn in different ways. With some types of materials you will see groups of students working cooperatively, and with others you will find an individual student working intently. Still other students may be walking through the classroom seemingly not engaged in any direct activity. Very often, this last type of student is engaging in absorbing the other students and materials through observation.

Role of the Teacher and Assistant The teacher is the facilitator of the children's autonomous learning processes, preparing the environment and giving students the tools to utilize the materials. Sometimes the teacher provides direct encouragement or indirect appreciation, and at other times judicious absence. There is a basic respect for each individual student's particular style of learning in the Montessori classroom.

You will notice that the classroom assistant may not be actively involved with teaching, but serves as a calm and gentle presence in the classroom, quietly helping to maintain the environment and unobtrusively supporting the teacher.

Sociability Watch the ways in which the students offer assistance to one another with the materials and with everyday tasks. Note how the younger students absorb the older student's work simply by being near them and how, conversely, the older student will assist the younger ones with work that they have already mastered. The student's natural desire to form friends and be part of an ongoing commu-

Part III Health & Safety

Contagious Disease Policy

While regular attendance is important for the continuity of the child's development, there are times when a child must be kept home. Please take a sick day whenever there is an unexplained rash, discharge from eyes, ears or nose, vomiting, diarrhea, severe pain, or fever. To protect all children attending school, state law requires any child with visible symptoms of what appears to be a contagious disease be sent home. **Please plan ahead for alternate care in the event your child needs to be kept home or be sent home because of illness.**

Please inform the school immediately if your child contracts head lice or is diagnosed with a communicable disease such as chicken pox or strep. Per NJ state regulations, we will notify families of the situation with a list of symptoms so that everyone can be aware should their child(ren) contract the illness. No mention of the infected child's name will be made.

Table of Excludable Communicable Diseases

A child who contracts any of the following diseases may not return to the center without a physician's note stating that the child presents no risk to himself/herself or others (see notes for chicken pox and lice).

Respiratory Illnesses

Chicken Pox*+
German Measles
Hemophilus Influenzae*
Meningococcus*

Strep Throat
Tuberculosis*
Whooping Cough*

Contact Illnesses

Impetigo
Scabies
Lice

Gastrointestinal Illnesses

Giardia Lamblia*
Hepatitis A*
Salmonella*
Shigella*

* Reportable diseases that will be reported to the health department by the center.

- If your child has chicken pox or lice, a doctor's note is not required to re-admit the child to the center. For chicken pox a note from the parent is required, stating either that at least six days have elapsed since the onset of the rash, or that all sores have dried and crusted.
- For lice, a note from the parent is required stating that treatment has been completed and no nits remain.

Emergency Procedures

Any accidents, incidents or illnesses occurring throughout the school day will be documented by staff using our Accident/Incident forms. Completed forms will be provided to parents for review and require a signature. For any major injury or one that occurs above the neck (minor or major) parents will be notified immediately via phone or email. 911 will be called prior to parent notification if the situation is life-threatening. If neither parent has responded within 10 minutes, emergency contacts will be called in order of preference. *Your emergency contacts must be able to drive and assume care of the child.* If the school deems it necessary, we will contact the child's doctor.

If a child falls ill during the school day, the administration will assess the severity and determine if it is best for the child to remain at school or be sent home. **Children with fevers above 100.4 will be sent home and shall be excluded from the facility for 10 days from symptom onset, or until they receive an alternate diagnosis from a healthcare provider or a negative COVID-19 test result. (exclusion criteria updated on 5/26/2021)**

Medication at School

Please do not place any over the counter or prescription medications in children's lunchboxes! If a child requires or may require medication of any sort during the school day, it **must be given to the teacher upon arrival** along with written instructions as to dosage & timing.

Prescription medication must have a signed note from the physician giving dosage instructions.

Secret Garden Montessori

School Health & Safety Plan for COVID-19

Policy and Procedures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are reviewed and reevaluated regularly by school leadership and Board of Trustees. SGM will continue to follow all mandates from the state of New Jersey. We remain committed to communicating with families as changes occur.

Updated February 2022

Pre-Screening:

All health forms need to be received on or before the child's first day of school or summer program. All immunizations must be up to date. All required medications must be documented on the school's medication administration form prior to the child's start date.

Attendance will be taken daily. If a child will be absent, we ask parents to inform the school via email (rosalie@secretgardenmontessori.org) or phone and include a reason for the absence, i.e, sickness, vacation, family event, etc. Absence notifications will be forwarded to the classroom teacher.

Children: To protect the health of all of our community and to prevent the spread of infection, parents must report to the school immediately if the child or any person in the child's household has or is suspected to have COVID-19, or has come into close contact with someone who has a confirmed positive case of COVID-19. State and federal regulations and guidelines will be followed, and confidentiality will be protected to the greatest extent possible.

Faculty/staff: All staff will report to the school immediately if they or any person in their household has or is suspected to have COVID-19, or has come into close contact with someone who has a confirmed positive case of COVID-19 or has any of the following symptoms: fever, shortness of breath, sore throat, cough, temperature, loss of smell, loss of taste, myalgia, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea.

Daily Health Screening:

Children: Health screenings for all students will be conducted daily at drop-off each morning. *Children and staff with a fever in excess of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, or exhibiting other symptoms of COVID-19, shall not be allowed to enter the facility, nor will persons that have exposure to persons known to have COVID-19.*

Faculty/staff: A health screening will be completed independently by staff each morning. Any staff with a temperature equal to or higher than 100.4 will be sent home.

Drop off and pick up: Cross-class exposure will be minimized during drop off and pick up times by the use of multiple entry and exit points and a refined transition to the classroom for each group. Details of each program's procedures and arrival and dismissal times will be included with program-specific communication at the beginning of the school year/summer program.

Visitors: Non-essential visits will occur after school hours. Essential visitors shall be scheduled and escorted into the school so that they will not come within six feet of students and non-visit related employees. All visitors shall be subject to the same screening procedures as children and staff.

Cohorting:

Cohorts are defined as ‘classrooms’ at our school. Sprouts and Primary classrooms will remain in their own learning environments when the overall attendance at school is over 30. During Summer Program, depending on attendance totals, classes may integrate at different times throughout the day.

Children and teachers will have close contact, but each classroom will function as an independent unit, and be socially distant from other classrooms, administration, and facilities, as much as is possible. Our goal is for children to be comfortable and able to freely move, learn, and interact. Keeping children in smaller cohorts reduces overall risk of transmission.

Masking:

Mask wearing during the school day and in all extended care programs will be optional after March 7, 2022, except during the following circumstances:

During periods of elevated community transmission, when COVID-19 Activity Level Index (CALI) is elevated to scores of high (orange) to very high (Red), all individuals will be required to mask while in school.

After returning from isolation or quarantine: All individuals who are permitted to return to school during days 6-10 of quarantine are required to mask while in school.

When illness occurs at school: All individuals above the age of 2 who become ill with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 while in school will wear a mask until they leave the premises.

Hygiene:

All faculty, staff, and children will wash hands thoroughly and properly upon entering the building, and frequently throughout the day, according to what is appropriate for that age group and recommended by the CDC. Teachers are responsible for setting and maintaining these routines.

Certain individual supplies will be provided to children, such as: scissors, pencils, markers, glue, playdough. Students will wash hands before selecting a work and disinfecting of materials will happen as often as possible.

Personal Item Requirements:

Clothing and other student materials will be stored individually in the child’s cubby or backpack. All personal belongings will be sent home daily. Linens need to be washed before they return.

Toys from home are not permitted in the school building.

Disinfecting:

SGM staff will implement sanitation procedures throughout the day, disinfecting high volume surfaces such as doorknobs, tables, and bathrooms regularly.

Materials in the classroom will be wiped down after use. High touch areas will be cleaned and disinfected/sanitized regularly and before and after activities such as meals, art projects, etc.

Each classroom has at least one Medify Air Purification unit. The EPA states “when used along with other best practices recommended by CDC and others, filtration can be part of a plan to reduce the potential for airborne transmission of COVID-19 indoors.”

Illness & Isolation:

Children are expected to be in good health when in school. Parents are asked to keep their children at home when showing any signs of illness.

Any child who exhibits signs of illness during the day will immediately be brought to the office for further evaluation and isolation. If a child exhibits a fever or is deemed to be too ill to remain at school, a parent will be called to pick the child up.

Students who are absent due to illness with covid-related symptoms must present a negative COVID-19 test result OR self-quarantine for 10 days without a test, and be symptom-free, before returning to school. Students with a temperature over 100.4°F (38°C) will need to remain fever-free, without fever-reducing medication, for 24 hours before returning to school.

Staff who are showing symptoms of illness will also be sent home to monitor for Covid-19 symptoms and will not return to work until cleared. Unvaccinated staff who have a family member who has tested positive for COVID-19 or have themselves come in close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19, will not come to school until they have completed the appropriate quarantine time according to NJ guidelines and cleared.

The school will immediately notify our county department of health of any suspected or known COVID-19 exposure at the school and will follow guidelines on partial or full closure of programs as required by the state. The community will be informed by email or phone call when an early dismissal or closure is needed. In the event of a facilities closure, depending on length of time, the school will implement an alternative learning program. In this case, tuition will remain the same, with the exception of Before and After Care Costs (when offered).

Emergency Medical Treatment Authorization

A signed emergency medical treatment release form is required to be on file for each student. This form authorizes the school to contact the child's physician directly for instructions.

If it is impossible to contact the physician, the school may make any arrangements deemed necessary. *Parents or emergency contacts are expected to transport children home or to the doctor/hospital.*

In the event of ambulance transportation directly from the school, an adult will accompany the child at all times until parent or emergency contact arrives at the hospital.

Policy on Releasing Children

Each child may be released only to the child's parent(s) or person(s) authorized by the parent(s) to take the child from the center and to assume responsibility for the child in an emergency if the parent(s) cannot be reached.

If a non-custodial parent has been denied access, or granted limited access, to the child by a court order a copy of the order must be submitted with your registration to be filed with your child's records and we will comply with the terms of the court order.

If the parent(s) or person(s) authorized by the parent(s) fails to pick up a child at the time of our center's closing we will attempt first to contact the parent(s) and then the emergency contact.

If the time reaches one hour past closing (6:30pm), and we are still unable to reach you and no longer able to supervise the child on-site, we will contact the 24-hour State Central Registry hotline to request assistance in caring for the child.

If the parent(s) or person(s) authorized by the parent(s) appears to be physically and/or emotionally impaired to the extent that, in the judgment of the director and/or staff member, the child would be placed at risk of harm if released to such an individual, we will NOT release your child and will proceed with contacting the next person on your pick-up list.

Early/Alternate pick up

To arrange for early pick-up, authorize another person to pick up your child, or extend your child's day, provide a written note in the morning if at all possible.

If your plans have unexpectedly change and you need to extend your child's day or give permission for an alternative pick-up, please call the school.

Be sure to supply the person's full name & relationship to child if they are unknown to us and have them be prepared to provide identification to the staff member releasing your child.

To report lateness or absence please call the school 908.628.9639.

Food and other Allergies

All allergies **must** be detailed on the child's Medical Emergency Information data sheet.

All allergy medications must be submitted in the original box with the child's prescription information on it. For families with food allergies or sensitivity concerns, you are welcome to bring in alternative snacks for your child.

PLEASE NOTE* We are NOT A PEANUT FREE facility.

Weather-Related Closings

Since we draw from several school districts which often make different decisions about delays/cancellations, we **do not** link our opening/closing decisions to any particular district. **Please plan to check your email on days when there is inclement weather. Any delay or closure information will be emailed to you directly by 6:15am.**

If we're open but you have concerns about the driving conditions, **please feel comfortable keeping your child home.** Please remember to call in absent!

The SGM school calendar will have 178 days with two days included for emergency closings. Any emergency closing days in excess of the two built in closing days will be added to the first three days of the April Spring Break. Should there be a need for further makeup days, two days will be utilized at the end of the school year in June. Emergency closing days in excess of 5 days will not be made up.

Emergency evacuation plan

Our emergency plans are on file with the Frenchtown Borough Police.

In the event of a mass evacuation, we will report to:

Frenchtown Elementary School

902 Harrison Street

Frenchtown, NJ 08825

Ph. 908-996-2751

In the event that the elementary school is evacuated, we will report to:

American Legion

510 Harrison St

Frenchtown, NJ 08825

Ph. 908-996-

ALL emergency evacuation/lockdown procedures are posted in the vestibules in accordance with our licensing requirements.

Fire Drill Procedure

We hold monthly fire drills to promote fire safety. The children practice lining up and walking out of the building when they hear a fire alarm sound. They are instructed to line up on the grassy area outside of the classroom and remain silent until they hear their name called in the roll. The teacher retrieves the roll book and emergency forms and the aide will check the bathrooms before departing the building. The classrooms are equipped with smoke detectors, alarms, and emergency lighting. The building is equipped with a sprinkler system.

Part IV Communication

SGM understands that one of the most critical components to a successful school experience is open, honest and ongoing communication between our organization and your family. As such, we have created a number of ways to stay in touch with one another.

The Parent Portal on the website

Please visit www.secretgardenmontessori.org and click on the “Parent log in” tab on the home page. You will be prompted to enter the password to gain access. The password changes annually. Here you will find the 2021-22 Family Contact List.

Weekly electronic newsletter

This weekly newsletter is typically issued on Fridays. In it you will find updates about classroom happenings, photos of the children in action, resources, upcoming events and other basic information. The platform we use can sometime send the newsletter into junk or spam folders, so please check yours if you don't see it in your inbox weekly.

Office phone

Please contact the office with any urgent matters or programmatic concerns. The school phone number is 908-628-9639. Administrative staff will be available by phone from 8:30am-3:30pm Monday through Friday. If you have a child enrolled in our Extended care program, an additional phone number will be provided to contact the school during extended care hours.

Staff Emails

A complete list of faculty emails is available at the bottom of our student directory. Emails sent to the administration during regular office hours shall be answered promptly. Please note that teachers are not readily available to reply to texts during daytime hours but will respond as soon as possible. If you need to communicate an urgent message, please do NOT call but email instead.

White board/Scheduling updates

If you are on-site at drop-off in the morning and would like to communicate a scheduling update for that particular day, please let staff know and they will note it on the white boards in either vestibule. Any notifications after morning drop off should be communicated by phone or email. All other scheduling updates requested for future dates should be sent via email to the office. Please do not consider the request approved until you receive confirmation notice from us.

Emergency notifications

Urgent emergency notifications including unexpected closures and delays will be distributed via email notification.

Conferences

Semi-annual parent conferences held in mid-November and mid-February are conducted for all students and provide an opportunity for the teacher to frame a narrative of the child's learning style, interests and progress on specific skills. Examples of classroom work will be shared.

Conference Days are considered in-service days for our faculty. Time slots will be offered during both day & evening in order to make scheduling easier. We appreciate having both parents in attendance if possible. While the parent conference is an appropriate time to discuss all aspects of a child's development in and out of school, if you have a specific concern, please do not feel you must wait for a specific date. We can easily schedule a mini-conference by phone or after school, & if necessary provide an activity for your child so you can meet with your child's teacher privately.

Record-keeping & Transfer of Records

We maintain an attendance record & written records of parent conferences for all our students. This serves as the formal educational file which is transferred to the student's 1st grade school when we receive an official request for release of school records. We will also pass on health records & reports on any educational/psychological evaluations.

Email & Social Media

The school website and social media outlets such as Facebook serve as the voice of SGM to the parent body and larger community, and are not designed to be venues for dialogue. Our Parent Evenings and school community events are opportunities for discussion and connection. Emails associated with SGM, and the contact information in the protected Parent Directory, are *not* to be shared or re-utilized. Announcements you would like to share with the parent body through the SGM Weekly ReadMe should be conveyed to office.

Photography and Screen time Policy

We request that parents DO NOT TO POST photos/video taken at school events on social media or picture-sharing sites without prior arrangement with the school. This protects all our community members' right to privacy.

Parents are given a photo/work release form at registration requesting permission to use their children's images & work in promotion for Secret Garden Montessori. Your consent to this release permits us to utilize photographs approved by us in our promotional materials online & in print. Parents will receive notification & possibly be asked to sign separate releases if photographs/work are to appear in a newspaper, blogpost, contest entry etc.

We do not have computer or television screens in our classrooms. On rare occasions, and only when it aides to illustrate a specific concept being taught, children will be shown brief clips from the internet on our school computer or laptop. There is no passive, recreational program viewing for our children at any time.

PART V Licensing Requirements

Information to Parents from the NJ Office of Licensing

Under provisions of the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Centers (N. J. A. C. 10 : 122), every licensed child care center in New Jersey must provide to parents of enrolled children written information on parent visitation rights, State licensing requirements and other child care matters.

In keeping with this requirement, SGM must also secure every parent's signature attesting to his/her receipt of the information. (The signature forms can be found in your registration packet)

Our center is required by the State Child Care Center Licensing Law to be licensed by the Bureau of Licensing of the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services. A copy of our current license must be posted in a prominent location at our center. Look for it when you're in the center.

To be licensed, our center must comply with the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Centers (the official licensing regulations). The regulations cover such areas as: physical environment/life-safety; staff qualifications, supervision, and staff/child ratios; program activities and equipment; health, food and nutrition; rest and sleep requirements; parent/community participation; administrative and record keeping requirements; and others.

Our center must have on the premises copy of the Manual of Requirements and make it available to interested parents for review. If you would like to review our copy, just ask any staff member. Parents may secure a copy of the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Centers, for a nominal fee, by writing to the Bureau of Licensing, Division of Youth and Family Services, CN 717, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0717, telephone (609) 292-1021 or (609) 292-9220.

We encourage parents to discuss with us any questions or concerns about the policies and program of the center or the meaning, application or alleged violations of the Manual of Requirements. We will be happy to arrange a convenient opportunity for you to review and discuss these matters with us. If you suspect our center may be in violation of licensing standards, you are entitled to report them to the Bureau of Licensing. Of course, we would appreciate your bringing these concerns to our attention, too.

Our center must have a policy concerning the release of children to parents or people authorized by parent(s) to be responsible for the child. Please discuss with us your plans for your child's departure from the center.

Our center must have a policy about dispensing medicine and the management of communicable diseases. Please talk to us about these policies so we can work together to keep our children healthy.

Parents are entitled to review the center's copy of the Bureau of Licensing's Inspection/Violation Reports on the center, which are issued after every State licensing inspection of our center. If there is a licensing complaint investigation, you are also entitled to review the Bureau's complaint Investigation Summary Report, as well as any letters of enforcement or other actions taken against the center during the current licensing period. Let us know if you wish to review them and we will make them available for your review.

Our center must cooperate with all DYFS inspections/investigations. DYFS staff may interview both staff members and children.

Our center must post its written statement of philosophy on child discipline in a prominent location and make a copy of it available to parents upon request. We encourage you to review it and to discuss with us any questions you may have about it.

Our center must post a listing or diagram of those rooms and areas approved by the Bureau for the children's use. Please talk to us if you have any questions about the center's space.

Our center must offer parents of enrolled children ample opportunity to participate in and observe the activities of the center. Parents wishing to participate in the activities or operations of the center should discuss their interest with the center director, who can advise them of what opportunities are available. Parents of enrolled children may visit our center at any time without having to secure prior approval from the director or any staff member. Please feel free to do so when you can. We welcome visits from our parents.

Our center must inform parents in advance of every field trip, outing, or special event away from the center, and must obtain prior written consent from parents before taking a child on each such trip.

Anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that an enrolled child has been or is being subjected to any form of hitting, corporal punishment, abusive language, ridicule, harsh, humiliating or frightening treatment, or any other kind of child abuse, neglect, or exploitation by any adult, whether working at the center or not, is required by State law to report the concern immediately to the Division of Youth and Family Services' Office of Child Abuse Control, Toll-Free at (800) 792-8610, or to any District Office. Such reports may be made anonymously.

Parents may secure information about child abuse and neglect by contacting: Community Education Office, Division of Youth and Family Services, CN 717, Trenton, 08625-0717.

Discipline Policies and Procedures

A key component of the Montessori philosophy is the concept of peace education and is woven seamlessly throughout the curriculum. We strive to assist children in becoming champions of peace and equality with valuable skills of creative problem-solving in order to cultivate their compassionate spirits. As such, we do not employ physical punishments or harsh language when disciplining the children.

Some of the methods we do employ include:

Instilling logical consequences and offering choices

Example: If a child knocks over a pile of books, the logical consequence is that he/she is responsible for picking them up. Example: "If you choose to play when it's work time, then you can do your work while the others have their play time."

Redirection

If undesirable behavior is displayed, rather than dwelling there, we simply invite the child to do something else and attempt to re-direct their focus. Young children are usually very receptive to this.

Taking responsibility for ones actions

Example: If one child offends or otherwise hurts another, we do not demand that they make an apology but rather let them know that they have "hurt their friend" and ask the offender to inquire with the victim as to what they need to feel better. Sometimes it's a hug, sometimes an ice-pack or even distance from their friend for a while. All these choices must be respected and followed through with.

Framing it in the positive

We try to always tell children what we want to see, not what we don't want. Example "Walk your feet" instead of "Don't run". This feels much better to both the child and adult and typically yields much better results.

Staying in the moment

There is no such thing as a "bad" child and we work hard to clearly address undesirable behaviors without condemning a child's character or forming negative expectations. Each moment is new and another opportunity to "do the right thing". We try also to take notice of positive behaviors and offer praise as they occur.

We also employ the methods from and highly recommend to all families, the book "How to talk so children will listen and listen so children will talk" by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish. We have a number of copies in our parent library for anyone interested in borrowing them.

Disciplinary Incident documentation policy

Whenever serious disciplinary events occur, the staff will document the occurrence in the form of an incident report. Families will be provided a copy and asked to sign a school copy acknowledging their receipt of the information. Further, on occasion the administrative team may issue a call home to report behavioral incidents when they are serious and/or pervasive. Through this process of documentation, we are able to recognize emerging patterns and remain in an ongoing dialogue with families about their child(rens) needs.

Suspension/Expulsion Policy

Unfortunately, there are sometimes reasons we have to expel a child from our program either on a short-term or permanent basis. We want you to know we will do everything possible to work with the family of the child(ren) in order to prevent this policy from being enforced.

The following are reasons we may have to terminate or suspend a child:

PARENTAL ACTIONS FOR CHILDS EXPULSION

- Failure to pay/habitual lateness in payments
- Failure to complete required forms including the child's immunization records
- Habitual tardiness when picking up your child
- Physical or verbal abuse to staff

CHILDS ACTIONS FOR EXPULSION

- Failure of child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time
- Uncontrollable tantrums/angry outbursts
- Ongoing physical or verbal abuse to staff or other children
- Excessive biting

PROACTIVE ACTIONS THAT WILL BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO PREVENT EXPULSION

- Staff will try to redirect child from negative behavior
- Staff will reassess classroom environment, appropriate nature of activities, supervision
- Staff will always use positive methods and language while disciplining children
- Staff will praise appropriate behaviors
- Staff will consistently apply logical consequences for not adhering to rules
- Child will be given verbal warnings
- Child will be given time to regain control
- Child may lose certain privileges
- Child's disruptive behavior will be documented and maintained in confidentiality
- Parent/guardian will be notified verbally
- Parent/guardian will be given written copies of the disruptive behaviors that might lead to expulsion
- The director, classroom staff, and parent/guardian will have conference(s) to discuss how to promote positive behaviors
- Parent/guardian will be given literature or other resources regarding methods of improving behavior
- Recommendation of evaluation by professional consultation

SCHEDULE OF EXPULSION

- If after the remedial actions above have not worked, the child's parent/guardian will be advised verbally and in writing about the child's or parent's behavior warranting an expulsion. An expulsion action is meant to be a period of time so that the parent/guardian may work on the child's behavior or to come to an agreement with the center.
- The parent/guardian will be informed regarding the length of the expulsion period.
- The parent/guardian will be informed about the expected behavioral changes required in order for the child or parent to return to the center.
- The parent/guardian will be given a specific expulsion date that allows the parent adequate time to seek alternate child care (approx. 1-2 weeks depending on risk to other childrens welfare or safety). Failure of the child/parent to satisfy the terms of the plan may result in permanent expulsion.

A CHILD WILL NOT BE EXPELLED IF A PARENT(S):

- Made a complaint to the Office of Licensing regarding a center's alleged violations of the licensing requirements (877-667-9845)
- Reported abuse or neglect occurring at the center (877-NJ ABUSE)
- Questioned the center regarding policies and procedures

PART VI Financial policies and agreements

Please carefully review these financial policies before signing your enrollment agreement.

SGM is supported through fundraising and tuition income. In order to adequately plan for and provide our quality educational programs, we rely on our families to make timely payments on their accounts.

No reduction or remission of fees will be permitted for modified usage, absence, withdrawal or dismissal, whether planned or unplanned.

SGM reserves the right to refuse admittance to anyone whose accounts are not in good standing.

For families entering or adding programs after the commencement of the program, a pro-rated fee will be established and agreed upon by both parties prior to signing an enrollment contract.

The academic year programs run from September through June with standard closures for holidays throughout. Our school calendar is published well in advance so families can plan accordingly for these. Programs running for the academic year are listed at the total cost for the school year and can be paid either in two lumps sums or in monthly installments from September through June.

Invoices are issued via email as a courtesy to families.

Families are obligated to make their payments on the established due dates regardless of when invoices are issued.

Requests for alternate payment schedules must be submitted to our office and are subject to the administration's approval.

Families with more than one child at the school, will receive a 10% sibling discount for the second and any additional programs of equal or lesser value.