



2024-25
Family Handbook

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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

Secret Garden Montessori has its roots in a home-based cooperative founded in 2006 by a group of families in the Delaware River Valley. 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 family's homes. Barbette moved around weekly to the homes and set up a traveling classroom, including practical life, work with didactic materials, art, outdoor experiences, and lots of nature study. In January 2009, the school opened at the Frenchtown Barn School and expanded twice, now offering a Toddler Classroom and two Primary Classrooms.

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 comprising of alumni parents, staff & community members. The Board is the guardian of the school's mission and is accountable for the school's financial well-being. Our board meetings are open, and we encourage active participation and engagement in this important work.

Board of Trustees as of July 2024

Dawn Mansley- Board Chair
Jena Detore- Vice Chair
Josh Weichler- Treasurer
Barbette Robillard- Secretary
Rosalie Adams, Melissa Velez, Brianna Walter, Kacey Meckeler- Ex Officio

(Staff Members Names and Contacts)

Rosalie Adams - Head of School
Melissa Velez - Lead Toddler Guide
Elizabeth Van Doren -Assistant Toddler Guide/ Lead After Care Guide
Brianna Walter – Lead Primary Guide
Natasha Alessandra- Assistant Primary Guide
Kacey Meckeler- Lead Primary Guide
Emma Turner- Assistant Guide
Denisse Martinez- Assistant Guide

Fundraising Committee

Throughout the year, SGM hosts several fundraising and community engagement events. Proceeds from our fundraising efforts typically replenish our yearly school scholarship fund. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, our school is dedicated to remaining accessible to the community. The generous contributions of time, hard work, and donations from individuals and organizations throughout Hunterdon County help us to thrive. There are many ways for families to get involved, including committee membership, single-event participation, and/or chairing participation in events. Please contact the office if you would like to get involved.

2024-2025 Fundraising Committee

Co-Chairs: Meredith Reiss/ Brittany Koons

Members: Christal Barr

Emily Kant

Lindsay Napolitano

Barbette Robillard

Rosalie Adams

Family participation

We embrace a cooperative spirit at SGM and invite families to participate in their child's experience actively. If you have any special interest or talent you'd like to share with the class, we invite you to speak with the Lead Guide about scheduling an appropriate time for you to come in.

Practical Life

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

You will receive a notice that it is your turn to send in an item, such as apples, carrots, toothpaste, 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.

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 based on race, color, religion, gender, national and ethnic origin in the 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 opportunities without unlawful discrimination based on 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.

Part II School Rhythms and Routines

Classroom Placement

Primary Classroom student assignments are thoughtfully considered and determined by teachers and administration. There are many factors considered during the placement process, such as maintaining a balanced mixed age cohort, student needs and social dynamics, and sibling placement in separate classrooms. Requests for your child's classroom placement will not be considered as the decision remains entirely dependent on the children's best interests and solely to the faculty and administrators' discretion.

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 is 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 a 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:

Primary Program Overview

8:30 – 8:45 am Morning drop-off
8:45 - 10:45 Morning work cycle
11:00- 11:45 Outdoor Play Time
11:45 Return to the school and prepare for Lunch or Dismissal
12:00 half-day students are dismissed
12:00-1:00 Lunch and Clean Up
1:00 -2:30 Afternoon Work Cycle and Rest
2:30-2:45 pm Care of the Classroom
2:45-3:00 Dismissal to parents

Toddler Program Overview

8:30 – 8:45 am Morning drop-off
8:45-10:45 Morning Work Cycle
10:30-10:50 Morning Gathering
10:50– 11:45 Outdoor Play Time
11:45 Return to the school and prepare for lunch or Dismissal
12:00 half day students dismissed
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

Our drop off window has changed this year! Please plan to drop off between 8:30 am and 8:45 am each morning. We ask that you continue to check in at the Primary entrance so that your child's attendance may be recorded for the day. Toddler families may proceed to the Toddler entrance where staff will be waiting to greet you.

Please remember, every child entering SGM is capable of walking into the school on their own two feet, and what a great feeling of independence it is when a child realizes that their parents/caregivers trust them! Please do not carry your child in as this communicates a dependent message to the child and discourages their independence. We want school to be a wonderful experience for each child and you can help in many ways. When it is time to pick up your child, please arrive on time or call the office if you are running late.

Unplanned late arrivals

We understand that from time to time an unplanned late arrival may be unavoidable. Parents arriving late (after 8:50 am) should email the school directly.

Planned Late arrival

Please call or email the school in the event of a planned late arrival or early pick-up. Children who do not rest in the afternoon should arrive no later than 11:30. The opportunity to have playtime with classmates will allow them to better engage in the second work cycle.

Early/Alternate pick up

If an early dismissal is needed during the school day, please plan to pick up at either 12:00pm or 2:45pm so as to not disturb the classroom schedules.

To arrange for early pick-up, authorize another person to pick up your child, or extend your child's day, please communicate with the office the morning of. If your plans have unexpectedly changed 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 email Rosalie at rosalie@secretgardenmontessori.org

Attendance/Absence & Lateness

Please call the school to let us know if your child will 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.

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

Parents picking up at 12:00 noon may pull up directly to their classroom entrance. Your child will be ready for you at the door and Staff will sign your child out for you for the day.

Please also see Policy on Release of children on page 11.

Toddler families: At pick up time, please refrain from parking or standing right in front of the vestibule door. This is very distracting for your child. The children are changing their shoes, putting on their coats,

and gathering their materials. If you are standing at the door, the child cannot focus on their job. You are welcome to wait in your car or down the sidewalk. We will wave to you when your child is ready.

Snack & Lunch

Please advise the Administration of all food allergies upon enrollment.

Snack: Please send your child a mid-morning and afternoon snack (when applicable) and a packed lunch each day. Teachers will send practical life requests home regularly to allow all families to donate food items to their class. Please look for a slip in your child's lunch box or backpack.

Lunch

We are an environmentally friendly school.

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. **Please send a labeled water bottle each day, water will be refilled as needed.**

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!

Please refrain from sending in individually packed snacks. Children often do not finish all of their food which can then spill into their bag and be wasted. Please buy snacks in bulk or in large containers/bags and transfer the food into snack containers. Stainless steel or glass is preferred over plastic. Thank you!

We also discourage the use of pouches. Please send applesauce/yogurt in a container. This gives your child the opportunity to use a spoon and learn the process of feeding themselves. This also cuts down on waste.

Encourage your child to pack his/her own lunch as a part of the morning or 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 11.

Birthdays

Children's birthdays will be celebrated in the classroom with a traditional Montessori "Walk Around the Sun." We ask you to please send in photos of your child from each year of their life, from birth to present. Photos will be returned. Although it is not necessary, you are welcome to send in a treat to be shared with the class. In the children's best interest, we ask you not to bring in any snacks with icing or other high sugar foods. Some examples of appropriate snacks would be small muffins (banana, blueberry, etc.), small cookies, or fruit salad/skewers.

Items for school:

Clothing

Clothing and shoes will be sent home quarterly to ensure that they properly fit and are seasonally appropriate.

Please send a pair of indoor slippers or shoes without characters and a rubber sole. All slippers should have a rubber sole as slippers without rubber soles do not provide enough protection and traction. Your child will wear these inside the classroom during their school 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. For outdoor play, children must have closed, sturdy sneakers, or boots. **Please do not send Crocs & flip-flops.** Sizes should be checked by parents throughout the school year as the children tend to grow out of them before they realize it.

Other Items from Home: Keychains and toys are not allowed at school

Please refrain from bringing keychains, toys or costume jewelry/ware are not allowed at school (Just say it's the school rule. Let us be the bad guys!) These items have proved to be a distraction during transition and during the morning work cycle.

Rest

Children who turn 4 years old during the school year will remain with their rest group for the entire school year. **If your child is registered as a full-day student, please send a nap roll in for them.** Each item should be marked with the child's name. Please note that these items will be sent home **weekly** to be washed. We will provide an assigned rest mat for your child to use. Our rest areas in both classrooms serve as a calming environment with dimmed lights and soft music. When children awake from their rest, books and other quiet activities are provided.

Observations

We welcome observations, typically in the mornings and after the children have settled into school year rhythms in September. We highly regard 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 avoid engaging the children in conversation. Please contact head of school to schedule appointment.

When visiting our school, ALL VISITORS are required to keep children's names, information, and conversations CONFIDENTIAL.

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 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 school 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 Contact Illnesses Gastrointestinal Illnesses

Chicken Pox*+ Strep Throat Impetigo Giardia Lamblia*

German Measles Tuberculosis* Scabies Hepatitis A*

Hemophilus Influenzae* Whooping Cough* Lice Salmonella*

Meningococcus* Shigella*

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

- If your child has chicken pox or lice, a doctor's note is not required to re-admit the child to the school. 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.

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 Lead Guide upon arrival** along with written instructions as to dosage & timing. Prescription medication must have a signed note from the physician giving dosage instructions.

Student Health Records:

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

Daily Health Screening:

Attendance will be taken daily. If a child is 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 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.

**Symptoms can include fever, chills, fatigue, cough, runny nose, and headache, chest discomfort, chills, cough, decrease in appetite, diarrhea, fatigue (tiredness), fever or feeling feverish, headache, muscle or body aches, new loss of taste or smell, runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, sore throat, vomiting, weakness, wheezing.*

Children with a fever in excess of 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit, or who have vomited or had diarrhea within 24 hours before returning to school shall not be allowed to enter the facility.

Students with symptoms of a respiratory virus should stay home and away from others until:

- The individual is fever free for 24 hours without fever reducing medication AND
- **Symptoms are improving**, which means the individual is no longer feeling ill and able to participate comfortably in educational and other activities as they did before they were ill. Any remaining symptoms, such as cough or runny nose are mild or infrequent.

Masking:

Individuals should take additional precautions when returning to school. These precautions include:

- Wearing a well-fitting mask.
- Practicing good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- Testing for respiratory viruses to determine next steps such as treatment.

Hygiene:

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

Health Related Notifications and Closures:

SGM will notify families of any increase in illness or outbreak of disease so that additional precautions can be taken according to individual family needs. Prompt notification to families regarding exposure to infectious diseases, including common respiratory viruses, allows for rapid testing, early treatment, and prevention of further spread.

SGM follows all guidelines from the NJ Department of Health for all illnesses outlined on the NJ Exclusion List provided in the Registration Packet. The school will implement partial or full closure of programs as required by the state. If there is a need for a physical closure, parents should expect contact from the Head of School announcing either an early dismissal (via email and phone call) or full closure (via email). Closures can last for 1-14 days (about 2 weeks). In the event of a facilities closure, depending on length of time, the school may implement an alternative virtual learning program. Please note that the school's operational costs remain the same for both in-person and virtual learning. As such, in the event of a school closure, tuition remains the same.

Emergency Medical Treatment Authorization

A signed emergency medical treatment release form must 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 always accompany the child until a 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 school 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 school'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 the emergency contact list.

Food and other Allergies

All allergies **must** be detailed on the Authorization for Emergency Medical Treatment form.

If medications need to be dispensed at school, families need to complete the **Permission for Medical Administration form**. All medications must be submitted in the original box with the child's prescription information on it.

Weather-Related Closings

In the event of inclement weather, we draw from several local school districts to make decisions about delays/cancellations. **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 6:15 am or by 8:15 the night before.**

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 has 178 days, with two days included for emergency closings. Any emergency closing days above the two built-in closing days will be made up during spring break or at the end of the school year. Emergency closing days above 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

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

American Legion
510 Harrison St
Frenchtown, NJ 08825

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

Fire Drill and Lock Down Procedures

We hold monthly fire drills to promote fire safety and Lockdown drills twice per year in accordance with our licensing requirements. ALL classrooms are equipped with smoke detectors, alarms, emergency lighting and intercoms. 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 to find the current Family contact list for the school year. You will be prompted to enter the password to gain access. Please note that the password changes annually and is sent out within the first few weeks of the new school year.

SGM Electronic Newsletter

A monthly newsletter will be sent out on the last Friday of each month during the school year and includes classroom happenings, photos of the children in action, Montessori-based resources, and upcoming school events.

Office phone

Please contact the office with any urgent matters or programmatic concerns via email or by phone. The school phone number is 908-628-9639. Administrative staff will be available by phone from 8:30am-3:30pm Monday through Friday.

Staff Emails

Emails sent to administration during regular office hours shall be answered promptly. 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 email the office.

Whiteboard/Scheduling updates

If you are on-site at drop-off in the morning and would like to communicate a scheduling update for that day, please let staff know, and they will note it on the whiteboards in either vestibule. Any notifications after the morning drop-off should be communicated by phone or email. All other scheduling updates requested for future dates should be emailed 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

Parent conferences are held in mid-November and mid-May and are conducted for all students. This time provides 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. While the parent conference is an appropriate time to discuss 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 this specific date.

We can easily schedule a mini conference by phone or after school, and 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 to include Facebook and Instagram serve as the voice of SGM to the parent body and larger community. These venues are not designed for dialogue. Emails associated with SGM and contact information in the protected Parent Directory, are *not* to be shared or re-utilized.

Photography and Screen time Policy

We request that parents **ONLY SHARE SGM photos/videos of their OWN CHILDREN on social media or picture-sharing sites. Photos with other children in the background should not be shared without prior arrangement with the school as this protects our families' right to privacy.**

Parents have the option to designate permissions on the Receipt of Information to Parents page regarding the use of their children's images and work in SGM promotional materials, both online & in print. The box below outlines the specific areas for permission. **ONLY CHECK THE ITEMS that you approve permissions for. If you do not wish to have your child photographed, PLEASE CHECK THE LAST BOX only.** 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 computers or television screens in our classrooms. On rare occasions, and only when it aids in illustrating 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 this time.

PART V Licensing Requirements

Information to Parents from the NJ Office of Licensing

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

In keeping with this requirement, Secret Garden Montessori must also secure every parent's signature attesting to his/her receipt of the information at the start of the new school year. (signature forms can be found in your registration packet)

Our school is required by the State Child Care School 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 school. Look for it near the administrative office.

To be licensed, our school must comply with the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Schools (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 school must have on the premises a copy of the Manual of Requirements and make it available to interested parents for review. If you would like to review our copy, please contact the admin office. Parents may secure a copy of the Manual of Requirements for Child Care Schools, 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 school 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 school 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 as well.

Our school 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 school.

Our school 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 school's copy of the Bureau of Licensing's Inspection/Violation Reports on the school are issued after every State licensing inspection of our school.

If there is a licensing complaint investigation, you are also entitled to review the Bureau's complaint Investigation Summary Report and any letters of enforcement, or other actions taken against the school during the current licensing period. Let us know if you wish to review them, and we will make them available for your review.

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

Our school must post a 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 school 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 school's space.

Our school must offer parents of enrolled children ample opportunity to participate in and observe the school's activities. Parents wishing to participate in the activities or operations of the school should discuss their interest with the Head of School, who can advise them on what opportunities are available.

Families of enrolled children may visit our school at any time without having to secure prior approval from the Head of School or any staff member. Please feel free to do so when you can. We welcome visits from our families.

Our school must inform families in advance of every field trip, outing, or special event away from the school, 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 school 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

Peace Education and the Positive Discipline model are the two pillars of Secret Garden Montessori's discipline policy. Montessori Peace Education and Positive Discipline are both rooted in fostering a nurturing environment that promotes peace within children, both in themselves and the world around them. Positive Discipline recognizes that "challenging" Behaviors in children serve as a form of communication, signaling unmet needs, emotions, or challenges the child may be facing. Instead of viewing these behaviors simply as defiance, we interpret it as a call for understanding and support. This approach involves active listening, validating children's feelings, and guiding them towards constructive ways of expressing themselves. By nurturing open communication and mutual respect, we strengthen children's emotional intelligence and nurture a trusting relationship between adult and child.

Behavioral Expectations

As is expected in the Montessori approach to education, the adults are the models of appropriate behavior for the children. We must always keep this in mind as we interact with each other and with the children. Whatever behavior we want the children to exhibit, we need to make sure that we are also

demonstrating that behavior, because children learn what they see, not what they hear. So, the first step in helping children develop self-discipline and self-control is for us to model self-discipline and self-control. We also need to model and teach the children appropriate strategies and techniques for them to use in handling conflicts. The general behavioral expectations for staff, student, or parent/guardian, are as follows:

Be Respectful:

- We use kind words
- We use gentle hands on our friends and the materials
- We use walking feet inside the building
- We keep self-to-self
- We use quiet voices
- We clean up after ourselves
- We walk around rugs on the floor

Be Caring:

- We ask a friend if they need help
- We help keep the classroom clean
- We cooperate with our friends
- We wait our turn

Be Purposeful:

- We work with concentration
- We choose work that we have had a lesson on
- We complete our work
- We control our bodies

Behavior Management and Consequences

One of the most powerful discipline tools is the guide/adult's ability to pair kindness with firmness, and to be a model of grace and courtesy. If a child displays difficulty following the rules of the community, the adult response will be positive and age appropriate. Verbal acknowledgment of a child's difficulties with the use of compassionate statements, reminders of the behavioral expectations, encouragement to engage in desirable behavior, reinforcement of desirable behavior, planned ignoring, distraction, substitution and/or removal from the situation are among the various approaches utilized.

It is important to acknowledge that children have the same range and depth of emotions as adults, however they are developing the maturity to put these feelings into perspective. The goal of Grace and Courtesy lessons and conflict resolution techniques is to validate feelings and give children the tools to successfully take care of themselves and others. Children learn what to do when someone is unkind or unfair and how to discuss conflicts when they occur. Guides and children act as mediators, coaching in conflict through a process of expressing their feelings and finding a way to fix their mistakes.

In addition to lessons, which teach social graces, there is significant emphasis placed on developing practical life skills. What we commonly refer to as misbehavior is often a symptom of an insecure and disempowered child who is attempting to communicate unmet needs. Children who are happily engaged with a clear purpose experience a great sense of accomplishment and power. When the child can do things for themselves, they will feel confident and in control. These everyday living skills, such as

pouring, scrubbing tables, dish washing, and polishing, also help the child learn to focus their attention and complete a task.

Disciplinary Incident Documentation Policy

Incident Reports

Parents/guardians are notified of issues/incidents, which occur during the school day, through an incident report (IR) form. If the incident requires further review or investigation, the parent/guardian will be notified of additional findings. The parent/guardian may be requested to attend a meeting to discuss the following:

1. The offense.
2. The student's conduct.
3. Illicit the assistance of the parent/guardian, to conduct an at-home discussion with the student and to develop a plan for the student to avoid any further incidents from happening in the future.
4. Provide an opportunity for the parent/guardian to discuss any concerns, thoughts, and/or provide the parent/guardian an opportunity to request the school's assistance.
5. Provide the student with an opportunity to discuss his or her feelings and what may have led the student to misbehave.

Two types of behaviors are documented on incident reports:

1. When a student is involved in an accident.
2. When a student has a medical concern; and
3. When a student does not respond to adult redirection attempts.

Any staff member who encounters a student who has experienced an accident, has a medical concern or who is demonstrating repeated difficulty complying with our school-wide behavioral expectations, must complete an IR form for that student. When a staff member completes a report, the Head of School will be notified immediately, so that the incident can be reported to the child's parent/guardian as soon as possible, but no later than by the end of the day.

Once an IR form has been initially processed by the Head of School, the form is sent home to the student's parent/guardian. In instances of ongoing dangerous, destructive, or demeaning behaviors, we expect families to collaborate with the teaching team to develop and implement a plan to support the child.

Suspension/Expulsion Policy

Unfortunately, there are sometimes reasons we must 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) 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
- Failure to collaborate with the Teaching Team for ongoing dangerous, destructive, demeaning

behaviors from their child

- Physical or verbal abuse to staff

CHILDS ACTIONS FOR EXPULSION

- Failure of the child to adjust after a period of 3 months.
- Ongoing physical or verbal behavior toward staff or other children that affects the overall safety of the classroom.
- Excessive biting; defined as a behavior that occurs weekly and is unresponsive to support/re-direction.

PROACTIVE ACTIONS THAT WILL BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO PREVENT EXPULSION

- Staff will reassess classroom environment, appropriate nature of activities, supervision
- Staff will use supportive/child-focused language while redirecting behavior
- Staff will apply logical consequences for not adhering to classroom expectations
- Child will be given time and space to regain control
- Child's behaviors will be documented and maintained in confidentiality
- Parent/guardian will be notified via email/phone or in person
- Parent/guardian will be given written copies of Incidents Reports that might lead to expulsion
- The Head of School, faculty, and parent/guardian will have conference(s) to discuss how to support the child
- Parent/guardian will be given literature or other resources regarding methods of improving behavior
- The staff may recommend evaluation via 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.
- 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 for the child to return to the school.
- The parent/guardian will be given a specific expulsion date that allows the parent adequate time to seek alternate childcare (approx. 1-2 weeks depending on risk to other children's 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 family makes a complaint to the Office of Licensing regarding a school's alleged violations of the licensing requirements.

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. To adequately plan for and provide our quality educational programs, we rely on our families to make timely payments on their accounts. 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 as a total cost for the school year and can be paid either in two lumps sums or in monthly installments from September through June. Families entering or adding programs after the commencement of the school year should contact the Head of School to determine a pro-rated fee prior to signing an enrollment contract.

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. 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.

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.

Families that are experiencing financial hardship are encouraged to meet with the Head of School to discuss alternative payment options. SGM reserves the right to dismiss a student on the basis of a delinquent account; however, we treat this as a last resort. We strive to work with our families to create a plan that works for both parties with the ultimate goal of allowing the student to remain enrolled.