



FAMILY HANDBOOK

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MISSION

The mission of our organization is:
To Inspire a Passion for Life-Long Learning

Vision

Escuela del Sol Montessori is an educational community rooted in the understanding of the interdependence of all life; we value diversity and encourage students of all ages to discover the role each plays in contributing to the community. A not-for-profit organization, Escuela administers multiple programs including Montessori early childhood, elementary school and Junior High classrooms, as well as the Harwood Art Center, a community outreach program based in arts education and service.

As the school's facilities and landscapes are renovated, rebuilt and improved, the campus becomes an urban oasis, celebrating its history and its future: an environment specially prepared to give voice to the core values embraced and promoted by our community. There will be areas for study, for exploration, for rest and reflection: areas appropriate in size and scope for young people and the adults who are there to provide guidance and learn alongside the children. The campus has areas for play, for gardening and urban farming, as well as classrooms, studios, and areas indoors and out to support the programs of both the school and its outreach program, the Harwood Art Center.

Since 1991 Escuela del Sol has operated a community outreach program known as the Harwood Art Center. The Harwood is a creative center for community and the arts, created to build a sustainable and vibrant local, statewide, and regional community by using the arts as a catalyst for personal empowerment, cultural enrichment, and social change.

The campus extends from Mountain Road on the north to Granite Street on the south and goes east from Seventh to Sixth Street on the west. Property acquisition to complete the campus and meet program needs is a goal.

Specific renovation and building details will be fleshed out during the current Master Planning process (started in the spring of 2015) to address programming goals. The process will include representatives of all stakeholders of the organization.

All employees are encouraged to join the wider community in exploring the organization's two web sites in order to remain up to date with the organization and its programs. Please visit www.escueladelsol.org and www.harwoodartcenter.org frequently.

Philosophy

We recognize that everybody is unique and that individual differences, when supported in a positive way, will allow each person to make a positive contribution to the community. That community can be a small group of friends, a classroom, a school, etc. Each classroom provides a learning environment that encourages independence, confidence, and cooperation while enabling each child to grow and learn at his or her own pace.

Children and adults interact with their environment, their peers, and their teachers in a manner that enables the learning process to occur in an optimal way through intellectual, social, and emotional support. This understanding provides the basis for all our educational programming, whether in the Montessori classroom or in an adult art class at the Harwood.

Community service and outreach is an integral part of the program and philosophy here at Escuela del Sol and its Harwood Art Center.

HISTORY

Escuela del Sol Montessori was founded in 1968. Families of the school who volunteered their time and efforts formed a Board of Directors, which ran the school for its first decade. In 1980 the building in the University area that housed the school was sold. A new home was found near Old Town. The buildings were renovated and a new program was started with Ms. Friedje vanGils as Escuela's first Head of School.

A second campus at 1114 Seventh Street NW was added in 1986 to accommodate a new Toddler program and the Elementary School. With community support and careful planning, Escuela was able to purchase the property in January 1997. Realizing a long-term goal, Escuela purchased an adjacent property in 1999 to build a new Primary building and consolidate the school on one campus. August 2001 saw the completion of the new classroom building designed by architect Eileen Devereux.

Escuela's facilities include the historic red brick building known as the Harwood Art Center. In 1991, this art center was added to the repertoire of Escuela's educational programs to further serve the community. Escuela del Sol received the 1995 Bravos! Award from the Albuquerque Arts Alliance for the school's support of the arts.

As we celebrate many years of service, while setting goals for a sustainable organization, Escuela del Sol Montessori faces the future with ensured stability, growing recognition for its outstanding programs, and widespread community support.



THE HARWOOD ART CENTER

The Harwood Art Center is the community outreach program of Escuela del Sol Montessori. It serves people of all ages from the diverse communities of New Mexico. The Harwood initiates opportunities for people to enrich their lives by experiencing and/or creating visual, performing, and literary arts. The Art Center provides studio, performance, and gallery facilities and offers programs, events, exhibitions, lectures, classes, and workshops for students and artists of all ages and skill levels. Escuela del

Sol, through its Harwood Art Center, fosters community involvement, promotes the arts, encourages advocacy, and provides opportunities for life-long learning.

Membership

Members of the Escuela del Sol community, that is, families enrolled in the school, have a family membership to the Harwood Art Center. Members receive newsletters, invitations to special events, and special rates on Harwood classes. Several local businesses also provide discounts on their goods and services for Harwood members. For more information, please call GuruAmrit Smith at 242-6367.



MONTESSORI HISTORY

Maria Montessori, Italy's first female physician and one of the great educators of the twentieth century, pioneered the work with children that we carry on today at Escuela del Sol Montessori. She was born in Chiaravalle, Italy, in 1870. Her first association with children began in 1898 with the "mentally deficient" at the University Psychiatric Clinic in Rome. Through intense study, observations, and long days of working with these children, she discovered that their problems were more emotional than medical, so she designed special learning materials to meet their needs and trained teachers to present them in a special way.

Montessori's success was proclaimed miraculous. Many of these children went on to pass state examinations that were written for "normal" children. In 1904 she opened her first school, Casa dei Bambini (House of Children). Her work became known as the Montessori Method. In 1929 she founded the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI). During the war years, her work was regarded as a movement for world peace. Indeed, she saw the child as the most legitimate hope for a new world. Honorary doctorates, recognition, and awards were

bestowed on her from countries all over the world. By the time of her death in 1952, she had gained an international reputation as an educator and had been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times.

Montessori fervently believed that children have an inner force that gives them the power and drive to achieve their full potential. When children are given the proper measures of guidance and freedom, this inner force enables them to focus on what they need to know and they learn with wonder, joy, and confidence. A vital part of the Montessori approach is a carefully prepared environment that is beautiful and orderly. It includes didactic materials designed to meet the needs of each child at her/his particular level of development. Through skilled observation, the adult is prepared to offer children the kind of instruction that will stimulate their interest and activity.

The special relationship between the child and adult in a Montessori classroom is conveyed by these words of a young child: "Help me to do it myself."

To read more about the Montessori approach, may we suggest:

- Montessori, Maria :
 - The Secret of Childhood, Ballantine, 1982
 - The Absorbent Mind, Owl Books, 1995
 - Education for a New World, ABC-Clio, 1989
- Lillard, Paula Polk :
 - Montessori: A Modern Approach, Schocken, 1988
- Lillard, Angeline Stoll: Montessori: The Science behind the Genius, Oxford University Press, 2005
- Standing, E.M.: Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work, Plume, 1998
- Nelson, Jane Ed.D.: Positive Discipline, Ballantine Books, 1996

Useful catalogs and information:

- The Joyful Child, for Birth to Three
- Child of the World, for Ages 3-12+
- The Michael Olaf Montessori Company, 65 Ericson Court, Arcata, CA 9552



SCHOOL POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Admission

Escuela del Sol Montessori does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, creed, ethnic or national origin, religion, ability, age, sexual orientation, or gender identification on any of its policies, including admissions.

Steps for enrollment are:

- Parents and/or legal guardians fill out the online inquiry form and tour the school.
- Parents and/or legal guardians fill out and send in an application form and fee.
- The child visits a classroom while the parents engage in an enrollment interview (where developmentally/age appropriate).
- Parents and/or legal guardians fill out an enrollment contract and are subsequently notified of the admission decision.

Applicants are given priority in the following order:

1. Families committed to continuing through Escuela's Elementary and Junior High programs
2. Siblings of students continuing at Escuela del Sol Montessori
3. Children of Escuela alumni
4. All other qualified applicants

The school seeks to create classroom communities balanced by gender and age. In general, the school prefers to admit children at age three or younger. Older students will be considered on an individual basis, as space allows,

with preference given to students with previous Montessori experience. Please note: if a family withdraws a child before the end of Primary, that decision may affect the admission of younger siblings.

All information obtained in the admission process is confidential and will be used only in the admission process. This information will not be available to the candidate, parents, or anyone outside the school's admission office.

Financial Aid: the Brother Mathias Fund

Financial aid decisions are based on need, with preference given to students already enrolled at Escuela. The tuition assistance program of the school serves as a way of helping the school provide socio-economic, racial, and cultural diversity in its student body. The school has rarely, if ever, provided total tuition assistance to any one student. Rather, we try to help as many families as possible by providing partial assistance. If your family has a special circumstance or need, please provide a letter of explanation to the school.

Escuela del Sol uses the School and Student Service for Financial Aid (SSS) of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS). SSS provides an objective and consistent method of determining a family's ability to contribute to educational expenses through the Parents' Financial Statement (PFS). This form is available online. To complete a PFS for Escuela, you will need to use the school's code – 3036. Once completed and processed, SSS sends Escuela an assessment of need. This assessment is what we use to determine aid awards. If you have questions regarding this process, please do not hesitate to call our office at 505-242-3033.

Awards are based on the relative need of families that have applied and on the funds available. While the school will make every effort to maintain financial assistance levels from year to year, conditions may change, so one year's award is no guarantee of awards in subsequent years.

Student Assessment

Our primary task is to help children flourish in an increasingly technical and competitive world. Graduates of Escuela del Sol leave with at least two critically important assets that we hope will sustain them throughout their lifetime: the ability to adapt and a love of learning. By the time our graduates are in the work force, it is estimated that they will have to change careers at least two or three times during their lifetimes.

Improvements in technology will increase the pace of life significantly. How do you prepare children for such a world? We work to enhance their ability to think logically, to cope with change, to cooperate with others, to pose creative solutions to problems, to defend their right to their own opinions and values, and to respect the rights of others. Their ability to adapt to change and their love of learning will be the keys they need to open any door of opportunity.

The school provides a qualitative evaluation of student performance that takes into consideration the whole child, including strengths, challenges, and social, physical, academic and creative achievements; the education your child receives at Escuela del Sol extends far beyond basic skills in math and language. Traditional grades provide a quantitative evaluation of a child's work. Grading creates an environment of winners and losers, undermining the spirit of cooperation and community. Research indicates that grading reduces creativity, as students aim for work that will be safe and acceptable to the adult. Therein lies a third powerful reason not to use traditional grades: the children begin to work to please the adult rather than themselves, to work for the extrinsic rather than the intrinsic reward. For these reasons, Escuela del Sol does not "grade" children.

Progress Reports and Conferences

The adults (whom we prefer to call guides rather than teachers to emphasize the nature of their role) who work with your child(ren) will generate two written progress reports during each year. These reports, provided via email at the end of each semester, will reflect your child's/children's social, emotional, physical, creative and academic work.

In the fall and spring of each year, parents must attend parent-teacher conferences to discuss their child's/children's development and experiences at school. The school strongly encourages parents to contact their classroom guide(s) if questions or concerns arise. Our faculty is happy to arrange after-school meetings to stay in touch with parents, working together as a team on behalf of our students.

Homework

Traditionally speaking, homework refers to academic work. However, we Montessori educators like to broaden the term: all work that is done at home is homework. Thus, the work we do for ourselves, to improve ourselves, to pursue our own interests and dreams is also homework. This work could be an extension of work done on the job or

at school, or it could be an unrelated activity or hobby that is meaningful to us individually. The line between work and play can become blurred here, just as work the children do at school is often fun.

Homework for the Elementary Child

When Escuela children return home at the end of the school day, we hope they will have time to relax, and we hope they will do some “homework” as well. Our homework expectations for the Elementary children are outlined in the Parents at Escuela section.

Outside Assessment and Guidance

The Montessori classroom can accommodate the needs of a wide range of children; some are able to receive special attention within that context. However, there are others who are not well served within a Montessori environment.

The school and its staff are committed to open and ongoing dialogue with parents regarding special concerns about every child’s progress. The classroom guide, in conjunction with the Program Coordinators and the Head of School, may, at times, request outside assessment and guidance for working with individual students. The reasons for such a request will vary greatly: often the guide may need more information about the learning style of a student to work with her/him more effectively. In these cases, the school expects to receive a complete copy of all test results and recommendations and, if possible, to meet with the parents and the diagnostician. The school commits to implementing all recommendations consistent with its mission, Montessori philosophy and methodology, and within its resources; the school expects parents to follow through on recommendations for tutoring, therapy, or other treatment.

Transitions/Classroom Placements

Continuity is the hallmark of the Montessori experience, as children stay in the same classroom for at least three to four years. This stability provides for both security and growth, as the child’s role within the group changes over time from being one of the youngest in the class to one of the oldest. The psychologist Alfred Adler identified birth order in the family as one of the most important determinants of personality. In a Montessori classroom, every child has the opportunity to be first a youngest child, then a middle child, and finally an oldest child within his or her classroom family. The only exception to this multi-year experience may be in the Toddler Community. Depending upon a child’s age when he or she first starts at Escuela, a child might enter the Primary program after only one year with the Toddlers. This mixed-age grouping contributes to the child’s personal growth in ways that traditional, single-age groupings cannot.

Dr. Montessori observed that each child passes through planes of development, each lasting six years, and each with distinct developmental characteristics and needs. She created learning environments to respond to each new plane of development. Some Montessori schools group children in six-year cohorts, corresponding to the full age span of a plane of development. This is particularly common at the elementary level, where schools may have grades one through six together in a single classroom. Most Montessori schools, however, split each plane of development into two sub-groups, so that classes have a three-year age range. Escuela del Sol follows this pattern.

Primary

For some children, entrance into a Primary classroom is their first school experience. For others, they move up to Primary from the Toddler Community. Independent care of self is one sign of readiness for Primary; this may include toileting and dressing. We also look to a child’s sense of order and independence. The sense of order can be seen in the careful handling of classroom materials and in following a daily routine. Independence is shown by the child’s successful separation from the parents, in the ability to choose his or her own work in the classroom, and in his or her ability to verbally express his or herself. Some children benefit from spending more than three years in the Primary program before moving to the Elementary School.

Junior Elementary

The transition from Primary into Junior Elementary marks the end of the first plane of development and the onset of the second plane. The minimum age for entry into the Junior Elementary is six years by the start of school. In determining a child’s readiness for moving to the Elementary, faculty first considers social and emotional maturity. We also look closely at the child’s academic skills; she/he needs to be reading and writing with some fluency to prosper at the Elementary level. The student also needs to have a strong sense of self-direction and independence, and the ability to work with concentration – alone or in cooperation with a group.

Senior Elementary

The transition into Senior Elementary occurs when a child enters the second half of the second plane of development, at approximately nine years of age. Some children benefit from spending a fourth year in the Junior Elementary. Each student's transition is considered by a joint committee of Junior and Senior Elementary faculty, in conjunction with the Head of School, and in consultation with parents. To make this transition successfully, the student must demonstrate increased independence, regarding both academic skills and personal responsibility. Academically, he or she needs to be ready for complex research and mathematical problem-solving. The student needs a high degree of self-direction to be able to consistently choose challenging work. Additionally, he or she must be a respectful and cooperative member of the classroom community.

Junior High

Students enter Junior High as childhood ends and adolescence begins – at about twelve years of age. This is the beginning of the third plane of development. Students at this age will demonstrate a high degree of personal responsibility, respectful engagement with the group, and well-developed academic skills. Escuela assists the transition to Junior High by offering student visits to our Junior High program and experiences within this potential peer group.

What Is the Parents' Role During Transitions?

Observation

When your child is about to move to a new level, we recommend that you come and observe a classroom at that next level. This ensures you will have a better understanding of the transition your child will be making (for specific information about observing in the classrooms, refer to Observations in the Policy and Procedure section of this handbook).

Orientation Meetings

At the beginning of the year, Escuela will provide orientation for all parents. Additionally, Toddler Community faculty will arrange a home visit to first respectfully meet these youngest members of our community within their comfort zones, before they arrive at school. Orientation, whether via video or personal visit, is essential for helping your child get off to a good start. Orientation will cover both practical information and the Montessori approach; everything from drop-off to lunches, from developmental considerations to academic preparation will be covered. If you have any questions that are not answered, please do not hesitate to contact the school office for more information.

Listen to your Child

To help prepare your child for a transition, it is important to listen. He or she will probably express a mixture of excitement and anxiety. Change can be scary; listening to your child's feelings and expressing your support will make a difference. Parents with concerns about whether their child is ready for the next level should contact the guide. Decisions will be based on the needs of the individual child.

What Does the School Consider During Placement?

Multi-Age Grouping: Building Community

At each level (except Toddler), children are clustered in small learning communities for a three to four year period. These small communities provide several advantages not found in traditional schools. Children work with others who are older and younger than themselves. The older students serve as role models and tutors for the younger students and, in the process, they gain confidence in their own abilities and self-esteem regarding their skill level and expertise. The younger ones watch the older ones, in the process gain a clear vision of what's expected of them, and have the benefit of working with and learning from their peers as well as the guide. This small community is a direct preparation for life in the family and in the workplace. Communicating and working well with others are important life skills.

Balance of Needs and Learning Styles

Each small learning community develops its own personality. The placement of children in these communities as they move from one level to another is a very important task. Each community needs a blend of learning and

personality styles so that it truly reflects larger communities. Grouping children by their intellectual abilities would defeat the greater goal of establishing a sense of community in the classroom.

Siblings

Siblings are not usually placed together. A child grows from developing new relationships with others. Building community requires individuals to extend themselves beyond their immediate circle of comfortable relationships.

The Placement Process

In traditional school settings, a child's placement in a classroom is often determined by the child's ability to get along with the teacher (and vice versa). Escuela del Sol is not an adult-centered educational system: it is child-centered. When students are moving from one program into another, their assets and strengths are analyzed and then students are placed in a learning community that needs their gifts. Placement is determined by matching the skills and needs of the individual with the skills and needs of the learning community. Our guides are one part of the learning community.

Three-Year Commitment

Because the composition of a learning community is selected very carefully, it is rare for children to be transferred from one community to another during this three-year period. We ask parents and children to make a three-year commitment to the learning community and, within that three-year period, to take advantage of the opportunity of getting to know other parents and children so that adults can also experience the benefit of a community network.

Parent Requests

Administration and faculty work hard to make sure that each child is placed in an environment where her/his needs will be met. If you have particular concerns about your child's learning style during a time of transition, you are more than welcome to meet with the Program Coordinators to discuss those concerns.

Expulsion Policy

Unfortunately, there may be times that we need to dis-enroll a child from our school, either on a short term or permanent basis. We want you to know we will do everything possible to work with the families of our students in order to prevent expulsion as an action. We also want you to know that our State CYFD (Children, Youth and Families Department) requires the school to have and to post this policy in the Family Handbook.

When a child is having problems at school:

- Staff will try to redirect child from negative behavior.
- Staff will reassess classroom environment, appropriate nature of activities, and supervision.
- Staff will always use positive methods and language while redirecting children.
- Staff will encourage and model appropriate behaviors.
- Child will be given verbal warnings and redirection.
- Child will be given time to regain control.
- Child's disruptive behavior and/or other problems will be documented and maintained in confidentiality.
- Parent/guardian will be given written copies of disruptive behaviors or other problems that might lead to expulsion.
- The Head of School, Program Coordinator, classroom staff and parent(s)/guardian(s) will meet in documented conference(s) to discuss and plan ways to support the child.
- The parent(s)/guardian(s) will be given literature or other resources regarding methods of improving behavior and supporting the child, such as a recommendation for evaluation via professional consultation.

Schedule of Expulsion

After the remedial actions above have been implemented without success, the child's parent(s)/guardian(s) will be advised verbally and in writing about the problems that, in the school's opinion, warrant an expulsion. The reasons for and the terms of the expulsion will be clearly stated and documented.

Parental actions that may warrant child's expulsion include:

- Failure to pay/habitual lateness in payment

- Failure to complete required forms, including the child's immunization records
- Habitual lateness in arrival or in picking child up after school
- Verbal abuse of staff or physical threats or intimidating actions toward staff members

Children's behavior or other problems that may warrant expulsion:

- Failure of child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time
- Uncontrollable tantrums/angry outbursts
- Physical abuse of staff and/or other children

Expulsion may NOT be based on the following parent/guardian actions:

- Made a complaint to the Office of Licensing regarding the school's alleged violation of the licensing requirements
- Reported abuse or neglect occurring at the school
- Questioned the school regarding policies and procedures

THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Background

The purpose of this agreement is to clarify expectations. What can parents and the school expect of each other as we enter into a partnership to aid the development of your children? This section of the Family Handbook aims to articulate expectations we agree on: what parents can reasonably expect of the school and what the school will ask of parents. It also aims to reduce the inevitable misunderstanding and disappointment that result when unstated expectations go unmet.

Questions Parents and/or Guardians may have:

Q. What can I reasonably expect from the school?

A. Our community of children and adults comprise a social environment and culture that impacts the child's experience. We strive to make this environment emotionally supportive and safe for every child. This does not mean there are no problems. It does mean we will work with your child in developmentally appropriate ways to deal with problems as they arise, empowering him/her with social skills, and aiding him/her in the development of emotional intelligence to prepare for a lifetime of working with others in different communities and organizations.

Q. What can I expect of the school academically?

A. Escuela del Sol aspires to fulfill its mission as a Montessori school. As a Montessori school, we are different from traditional schools. Our first commitment is to the multi-dimensional development of the child. Montessori children do amass a great deal of factual knowledge in school. However, our aim is for each child to be far more than a simple repository of this information: we guide each child to think for herself. Cognitive development and a solid academic foundation are important, yet they represent only one dimension of our aspirations for your child. Equally significant is your child's social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development. Children are given choices and a great deal of freedom—within limits—during the school day. The choices a child makes, and the accompanying responsibilities, influence the emerging character of your child. Choosing his or her own work and shaping it to a considerable degree, following that work through to completion while working independently or in cooperation with others, the Montessori child identifies his or her interests and develops his or her individual gifts. As an Elementary School graduate said, "Montessori students motivate each other to be self-motivated."

Q. What can I expect in terms of communication from the school?

A. We aim to maintain open, honest, timely, and respectful communication with you about your child and about information affecting the school community.

There are two regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences each year and two written summaries or progress reports. In the event of special concerns, your child's guide will contact you to discuss these concerns by phone, by email, or in person. In addition, we will communicate with you via classroom letters, the website, email messages, and short reports as needed for individual children. Each Escuela guide is a well-trained professional; his or her

evaluation is confidential and based on direct observation of your child. Our faculty will always offer the current best understanding of your child's progress and his or her strengths and needs. For all children, this evaluation is based on the guide's observation, which may be augmented by input from the Program Coordinator and/or auxiliary staff.

Regarding ongoing, school-wide communication, the school sends out a weekly e-newsletter, a periodic "hard copy" newsletter, Buenos Dias (also available at www.escueladelsol.org), a Parent Handbook, and Family Directory. The school website contains important updates for individual classrooms, school calendar, lunch menu, etc.

Q. What can I expect of the school environment?

A. We strive to ensure an environment that is physically and emotionally safe and supportive, as well as aesthetically beautiful.

Dr. Montessori said that the classroom guide's first responsibility is to prepare the environment. This means the learning materials should correspond to the developmental characteristics of the child at each level and that those materials must be attractive to the child: correct in size, aesthetically pleasing, well maintained, and complete. More broadly, the whole school environment must meet these criteria: to appeal to the child and to inspire his work. We are ever vigilant to ensure that the school building and grounds are physically safe, secure, and well maintained.

Q. What professional standards can I expect of the school and faculty?

A. The school maintains accreditation with the American Montessori Society (AMS). This organization represents the most exacting standards of excellence for Montessori schools, both public and independent. The Early Childhood Program of Escuela del Sol (Toddler and Primary) is licensed by the Children, Youth and Families Division of the State of New Mexico.

At minimum, all lead guides have received a diploma from an AMS or AMI (Association Montessori International) teacher-training center. Many hold dual level certifications and/or Master's degrees as well. Our guides have a sense of mission in working with children and demonstrate high standards for themselves and their students.

The school promotes a culture of professional growth in a number of ways. Guides work annually with the Program Coordinators and Head of School to create an individual action plan for meaningful faculty evaluation, driven by goal setting for professional development.

Q. What can I expect of the school administration?

A. Integrity; a focus on the needs of the individual child in harmony with the life of the community; mission-driven decisions embodying good stewardship and responsible management; and an open door to your questions or concerns.

Administrative staff interface with all the various constituencies of the school: students, parents, extended family, faculty, board members, alumni, prospective parents, professional visitors, government officials, other schools and educational organizations, and the general public. In your interactions with the administration, you can expect professional, courteous, and business-like conduct, as well as mutually respectful communication.

The Head of School, Assistant Head of School, Business Manager, Program Coordinators, and support staff comprise the administration of Escuela. The administrative team may, on occasion, face decisions requiring a balance of competing interests. Sometimes those factors are mutually exclusive; at times equally well-intentioned adults see matters differently. In making decisions, the administration will focus on the interests of the individual child in balance with the needs of the school.

What does the school ask of parents?

A. Escuela asks parents and guardians to make continuing efforts both to understand and to embrace the Montessori approach and to work in partnership with the school.

These efforts should begin before admission. Escuela desires parents who understand and embrace the mission of the school. To that end, we help parents learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for parent workshops – so that parents can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children – and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family's years at the school. Once children

are enrolled, the school asks parents to attend regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences and parent workshops, and to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies, and procedures contained in this Parent Handbook and other school publications. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations.

Q. What contribution can I make to a positive school community?

A. Demonstrate respect for all adults and children, the school, and the school's programs.

Model respect to your children – for them, their classmates, parents of classmates, guides and other school staff – in short, for everyone associated with the school. Respect begins with civility and deepens into trust. Our most fundamental behavioral guidelines for the children are “respect yourself, respect others, and respect the environment.” We ask the same from adults, parents, and school staff, at all times and in all relationships within the school community. This includes speech and outward behavior. Support your child by speaking of her/his guides, classmates, and school in positive terms. Respect and abide by the school's policies and procedures. Honor your commitments. Look for ways to make a positive contribution to the life of the school.

Q. How can I create consistency between home and school?

A. Strive to parent according to Montessori principles.

Learn as much as you can about Montessori principles as they apply to preparation of your child's home environment, as well as the way we adults interact with our children. This begins with the general principle: “Never do something for your child that he can do for himself.” Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that a child can do for himself at each stage of development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which we were parented. Children develop a love of learning and become responsible, independent, and capable when parents' values and expectations are consistent with those of the school.

Q. What are my responsibilities regarding communication between home and school?

A. Maintain active, direct and respectful, two-way communication with the school.

Read communications that are sent home, including letters, newsletters, emails, and calendars. Inform the school in a timely fashion of pertinent changes in your child's life. Active communication involves parents sharing observations and concerns about their child with the child's current guide. In matters large and small, remember the principle of respect: even when there is disagreement, disagree respectfully. Children prosper most when the primary voices in their lives sing in harmony. Let's work together for that music to happen!

ESCUELA COMMUNITY

Mentor Families

How does drop-off work? Where is Extended Care? Am I supposed to bring my child to parent/teacher conferences? What's the difference between a parent workshop and “Bring Your Parents to School Night?”

A few years ago, a small group of Escuela parents were chatting and agreed that it can be bewildering (sometimes downright overwhelming!) for a new family entering the school community. They decided to create a mentoring program and put plans in place to welcome new families and help ease their transition.

Mentors will contact new parents as the school year begins and provide support and guidance throughout the year. We would like to establish this tradition and have called upon seasoned Escuela parents to help.

Some mentor duties include:

- Calling and introducing yourself, as soon as possible.
- Suggesting a casual get together at a local park or meet for coffee in the Escuela plaza when school starts
- Planning to meet up at the Family Dance and Picnic

Organizational Governance

Escuela del Sol Montessori is incorporated as a non-profit corporation and managed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. The Board is governed by the school's Articles of Incorporation and by its By-Laws. The Board is

comprised of members selected from the community who are chosen for expertise in their respective fields, their commitment, and ability to work on behalf of the whole organization (Escuela del Sol and its Harwood Art Center). Candidates for board service are evaluated by the Board's Development Committee. The Board of Trustees serves as custodians of the integrity of the school, holding in trust the school's future as well as its present. Their collective judgment respects the interests of constituents and of the larger society that all independent schools serve. The Board as a whole represents continuity and permanent responsibility. It is responsible for effective strategic planning and the school's fiscal well being.

The Board selects, hires and evaluates the Executive Director who, at this time, is also the Head of School. The Board delegates responsibility for implementation of policies to the Head. The Head of School works with the Business Manager to prepare the Annual Budget for approval by the Board. She also has the duty to report to the Board on organizational matters and is accountable to the Board for effective, businesslike management of the organization. The Head of School serves as the professional educational leader of the institution. She has complete responsibility for faculty, staff, and student selection, evaluation, and dismissal. The Head of School articulates the mission of the school to its constituencies and is responsible for the professional quality and behavior of the faculty and staff.

OFFICE RECORDS AND REQUIREMENTS

Enrollment Contract

Please read your enrollment contract carefully.

For the Elementary and Junior High School programs: Note that signer(s) of the enrollment contract are obligated to pay the full school year's tuition, in its entirety, if your student is not withdrawn before July 1, previous to the start of a school year.

For Early Childhood programs (Toddler and Primary): signer(s) of the enrollment contract are obligated to pay the full school year tuition, in its entirety, if the student is not withdrawn prior to February 1 of the school year. In addition, one month's notice, in writing, is required prior to withdrawal.

Records

An Enrollment Contract, Student Admission Record, health records (that include immunizations, allergies, and/or illnesses the school should be aware of), emergency contact numbers, permission for emergency care and transportation, and the child's doctor's name and number are all required by the State of New Mexico. This information must be kept updated. Parents should notify the school of any changes in these records (e.g., address, phone, and email changes).

For children whose parents are divorced or in any other situation where custody may be an issue, clear direction regarding matters of custody must be filed with the school office and the classroom guide.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition payments are made through the "SMART" Tuition Plan unless you have chosen to pay in one or two installments. Tuition-related questions should be addressed to Escuela's business manager, Chris Loss: (520) 577-2739. Fees may be assessed for late payments and/or students may be disenrolled for non-payment of fees.

Illness/Injury

If your child has suffered a severe injury or is seriously ill, we will call 911. The emergency system transports all critically injured people and most seriously ill children to UNM Hospital, according to a citywide protocol. We will contact you after we call 911.

If your child is less severely injured or ill, we will attempt to contact you first. However, we will not delay needed care to do so and will call your pediatrician and/or emergency contacts if we think this is appropriate.

Consent: Your permission is needed before your child can be treated, unless a true emergency exists. Make sure the consent statement found on your child's Student Admission Record is signed and dated by a parent or legal guardian.

The child's teachers will report any minor injuries and accidents to parents at the end of the day.

Please help minimize the spread of illness among our students. If your child has any infectious illness (cold or fever, chicken pox, diarrhea, vomiting, strep throat, conjunctivitis, etc.) keep him/her home and call us so we can alert our other parents. Children who are sick should not be at school. If a child is not well enough to play outdoors and interact actively with other children, the child is too sick to come to school.

Upon arrival at school, all students (and faculty and staff!) will be asked to wash their hands before beginning work in the classroom. This simple process will help reduce the spread of illness as we head into cold and flu season. It will also offer an additional layer of protection for our students with food allergies.

A child who is not feeling well or who has a contagious rash or ailment such as "pink eye" will be sent home.

When a child becomes ill at school, parents will be called. If parents cannot be reached, the family's emergency contacts will be called to pick up the child.

If your child is going to be absent or is ill, please call the school before 9 a.m.

Medication

Our staff can only administer medication with written permission from a parent or legal guardian. Medication must be given to the child's guide and must be in the original container labeled with the child's name, name of medication, dosage, and hours it is to be given. Only prescribed medications such as antibiotics and medications for chronic problems such as asthma will be given. Medical authorization forms are available in the office.

Make sure that the office and the teachers are aware of any health conditions such as special diets, allergies, etc., that your child may have.

The following is a list of symptoms to guide you in deciding whether your child should be sent to school. Do not send your child to school on days when any of the following symptoms are present or were present the night before:

- Fever (temperature over 98.6F)
- Rash
- Persistent cough
- Discharge of discolored or profuse amounts of mucus from the nose
- Ear ache
- Diarrhea
- Impetigo
- Pink eye/conjunctivitis
- Vomiting
- Sore throat
- Live head lice or nits

CLASSROOM INFORMATION

Arrival and Pick-up of Children

Escuela del Sol is open Monday thru Friday from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Elementary School classes start promptly at 8:15 a.m.; Toddler, Primary and Junior High start at 8:30 a.m. Children should arrive no later than 5-10 minutes before the start of class and no earlier unless signed up for extended care. All children should be picked up within 10 minutes of the end of their session. Anyone picking up his/her child more than 10 minutes late will be charged for childcare at the rate of \$10.00 per hour, for a minimum of one hour, unless the student is enrolled in the Extended Day program. Rates and details may be found on the school's Tuition and Fee Schedule.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of being on time and of making sure your child's guides know your plans. Whenever there is a change in the student's transportation plans or pick-up time, please let guides know.

Children will be released only to persons known to the staff and to those for whom we have written permission. Unless Escuela is notified in advance or the child has a note requesting otherwise, the child will not be released. Please be sure a staff member is aware of your child's arrival and departure from school.

Sign-in and Out

There are sign-in sheets by each classroom to sign your child in and out. This must be done daily as your child arrives and leaves the school. We ask your cooperation with this important procedure. It is done for your child's safety and is a State requirement. If you have any questions about the sign-in/out procedure, please ask your child's teacher. These are legal documents; please do not allow children to deface them.

Delays and Closures

Escuela follows APS decisions regarding delays and closures. If APS is closed or on an abbreviated schedule due to severe weather or poor driving conditions, Escuela will follow suit. If APS is on a 2-hour delay, the Elementary School will begin at 10:15 a.m., the Primary and Toddler programs at 10:30 a.m. (There will be no early morning childcare.) In the event of a snowstorm during the day, it may be necessary to close early. Please listen to KOB television or radio (local channel 4, 93.3 FM/770 AM) for announcements of schedule changes or early closures.

Drop-in Extended Care

If you need to leave your child at Escuela for extended hours, please notify the office at least one day in advance. The charge for drop-in extended care is \$10.00 per hour with a minimum charge of one hour.

Parking

Toddler families: Park in our paved south parking lot (entering from Granite Street, exiting onto Seventh Street) and walk your child into school. NEVER park in the fire lane. Please use extreme caution in the parking lot.

Primary and Elementary families: We hope you will take advantage of our curbside drop off system in our south parking lot. From 8-8:15 a.m., Elementary faculty is available to assist your student(s) in disembarking from the vehicle and walking to class. Drop-off is available to Primary families from 8:10-8:30.

Senior Elementary School families: Students can enter and exit from the front of the Harwood Art Center (on Seventh Street).

The parking lot on the north side of the Harwood building (off Mountain Road) is for STAFF PARKING only. Please do not use this parking lot for drop-off.

Junior High students are dropped off in front of the Junior High House on Sixth Street.

NO Nuts, Please!

Escuela del Sol is now a nut-free campus; this includes not only peanuts but all tree nuts as well (cashews, pistachios, almonds, walnuts, pecans, macadamias, piñon/pine nuts, hazelnuts, etc.) We ask that you do not send snacks OR lunches that contain any form of nut. (Please remember that every granola bar, whether the ingredient list includes nuts or not, most likely contains trace amounts due to shared processing/packaging facilities.) We understand that for some families nuts are a staple and a great source of protein but for others however, exposure to them is, quite frankly, a matter of life or death. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in this matter.

Snacks/Birthdays

Morning snacks are provided by parents for Toddler and Primary classrooms. Snacks should be wholesome and sugar-free (even birthday snacks!). Some ideas for snacks: fresh, organic fruits or vegetables (celery, carrot sticks); whole-wheat crackers; and a source of protein, etc. Do not send candy, gum, sodas, Kool-aid, etc.

Toddler and Primary: Please contact your child's guides for snack schedules/calendars and birthday policies.

Elementary: Students bring their own morning snack. Please encourage your student(s) to bring a healthy, sugar-free snack (an apple, for example).

Lunch

If your child brings lunch:

Please be aware that we have very limited refrigerator space and time to microwave. Please use ice packs when necessary, send hot foods in thermoses, and do NOT pack frozen dinners. Mark lunches with the child's name. It is not necessary to provide a drink; the school will provide drinks for the children. Please do NOT pack sodas in your child's lunch.

Lunches can be purchased from The Harwood Cafe. For questions regarding prices and menu, please call (505) 620-4862. The menu can also be viewed via Escuela's website – escueladelsol.org.

Changes in Home Routine

Please keep the staff informed of changes in a child's normal routine. Occurrences such as parents being away, separation, divorce, death in the family, etc., can sometimes be the source of changes in your child's behavior. When the guides are aware and understand the child's behavior, they can be more helpful to the child.

In-Service/Staff Work Days

Escuela faculty and staff will take up to three in-service days during the school year. These days are a necessary part of the school year because they provide continuing education and work time (for making classroom materials, etc.) for the staff. Staff work days contribute to the excellent quality of care your children receive at Escuela. The school will be closed on these days; no childcare will be available.

Discipline & Confidentiality

Discipline will include positive guidance, redirection, and the setting of clear limits that foster the child's own ability to become self-disciplined. Disciplinary practices are designed to encourage the child to be fair, to respect persons and property, and to assume personal responsibility and responsibility for others.

Student records, family situations, medical history, children's school performance, behavior, etc., are held private and confidential. Teachers will never discuss a child with anyone other than that child's own parent(s)/guardian(s) unless written consent to do so has been given by those parent(s)/guardian(s) or when consulting with another staff member or administrator.

Behavioral Expectations

If a child frequently behaves in an unacceptable manner, guides will consult with the Head of School, Program Coordinator, and with the child's parents. If necessary, the school will suspend a student for up to three days at a time. More extreme measures (disenrollment) may be taken if the student and his/her parents are unable to work with the school to resolve behavioral issues successfully.

Behavior may reflect a need for counseling or educational/psychological screening. Parents are expected to work with faculty for the child's best interest. This may include hiring an outside consultant to work with the family and school.

In the interests of peaceful accord, and to prevent damage or loss, we ask your cooperation in seeing that money, toys, gum, candy, balloons, etc., are left at home. Such items can be sources of great distress and distraction.

Dress

Children of all ages should come to school in clothing that is comfortable yet neat and clean. Do expect your children's clothing to get soiled from playing and participating in activities such as cooking, painting, etc. Children in our Toddler and Primary are asked to bring extra changes of clothing (please see supply lists). Students' apparel should reflect respect for oneself and for others. Do not allow your child to wear clothing that is torn, overly baggy or improperly tight and/or revealing. We ask that clothing not display wording or graphics that are disrespectful and/or rude. Hats may not be worn inside the classroom. Please do not allow your child to come to school in costumes or "dress-up" clothing w/ high heels, etc.

Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect

Faculty and staff are aware of the indicators of child abuse/neglect. If a staff member suspects child abuse/neglect, this will be noted in writing, the Head of School alerted, and the Children Youth and Families Department (CYFD) notified, if warranted. If child abuse, in our opinion, has definitely occurred, it is our legal responsibility to notify CYFD.

Emergency Procedures

Escuela's Emergency Procedures, Safety Policies, and Disaster Preparedness Plan are available in the school office.

PARENTS & ESCUELA

As a parent at Escuela del Sol, you will have the opportunity to be actively involved in your child's education away from home. At Escuela, we strongly believe that the process of education cannot be separated from the home and family life. Being a part of your child's schooling will be a rewarding as well as an educational experience. Parent nights, newsletters, and a standing invitation to visit, participate, or observe in our school give parents the opportunity to augment their understanding of the Montessori philosophy and their children's activities.

Observation

After a settling-in period of two to four weeks, parents are invited to observe. This is your school and you are always welcome. We do ask that you make an appointment through the office. Out of respect for the children, we limit the number of adults in a classroom and encourage parents to observe in a classroom other than the one their child attends (as this can be very confusing, distressing, and distracting for your child).

Conferences

Parent/teacher conferences are held twice a school year (see calendar). At other times, conferences between the staff and parents can be arranged by appointment. The school will be closed for conference days; childcare is available on a limited basis for children who are pre-registered.

Suggestions/Complaints

If you become dissatisfied with the school in any way, please seek to resolve the matter with the person or persons involved rather than spread criticism. Please know that the administration and faculty of Escuela del Sol value the well-being and happiness of children and know that if parents are unhappy, children soon will be, too. Talk to us as soon as you have any questions or feel any dissatisfaction. We will work together to resolve any situation that may arise. If you have any problems with your child's guide or class, please discuss this with the guide and/or the Head of School (Ms. Friedje vanGils). Any administrative problems can be discussed with a member of our management team or with President of the Board, Maria Geer.

Communication

The organization has two web sites; one for the school (www.escueladelsol.org) and one for its outreach program, the Harwood Art Center (www.harwoodartcenter.org). These two sites provide a wealth of information; you are strongly encouraged to visit both sites regularly. One of the most important features of the school's web site may be its calendar. Here you will find information about the entire organization's events, holidays, and school closures. The Bulletin Board at the top right hand corner of the school site provides brief reminders of upcoming events and/or notices such as unexpected closures (snow, etc.).

A weekly, digital newsletter is provided to all currently enrolled families. Please be sure the school's email is not placed in your server's spam folder so you do not miss out on information, news headlines, and reminders.

Parent/Faculty Work Days

Parent/faculty work days are scheduled for various events and/or needs. If you cannot attend these work days, a tax-deductible donation will be appreciated. These donations in lieu of work go toward tools, paint, etc., for the projects to be done. There is always plenty of work to do in the way of repairs (building and classroom materials), gardening, and improvements. Please let your student(s)' classroom guides know how and when you can help.

FUNDRAISING

The tuition you pay covers only the school's basic operating costs. Tuition is not sufficient to provide financial aid to students (which keeps diversity alive at Escuela) and renovations to playgrounds and buildings.

It is the goal of Escuela del Sol Montessori to fully cover basic operating expenses through tuition and fee payments and earned income. At the same time, the school does engage in fundraising, as does virtually every independent school. Money raised through the fundraising events and drives help to support:

- Student financial assistance
- Professional development for faculty and staff
- Physical and programmatic enhancements and enrichment

ESCUELA STUDENTS AT HOME

Escuela del Sol Montessori welcomes and values diversity of every kind. The Escuela community includes a large variety of families with diverse child-rearing practices and values: people who differ widely in their behavior and beliefs. The common thread among our families is a commitment to their children and parental involvement in education.

There are a few basics that the faculty and staff of Escuela del Sol know will help all our students. Please give some consideration to the following:

- Children need consistency. It is especially important for children from toddlers through elementary ages to experience consistency in caregivers, mealtimes, bedtimes, and waking up times.
- Please pay attention to your children's screen time (computers, video games, television, etc.). Consider both the content and the duration. A thoughtful book on the subject: Endangered Minds by Jane M. Healy, Ph.D. Consider the following:
 - The content of many shows, sites, and games are clearly unsuitable for young children, including those in sixth grade.
 - Fictional circumstances do influence behavior. They may not have overtly objectionable language or situations, but do convey values which you do not share and which merit, at least, family discussion.
 - Time spent in such pursuits limits opportunities for growth and development, personal/social interactions, creativity, problem-solving, exercise, etc.
 - Much of prime-time TV falls into the unsuitable category.
- Children need active play. Even though there is playground time and P.E. in school, imaginative, active play at home (alone or with siblings) is crucial and productive.
- Children need a good breakfast. We understand that some children do not want to eat much right after waking up. Please try to adjust their schedule so there is time to eat.
- Encourage your child to read. Depending upon the age of your child(ren), this can mean looking at pictures, reading together with a parent, listening to a story, or reading on one's own. Reading as a fun, relaxing activity is an easy habit to nurture.

Homework for the Elementary Child

When Escuela children return home at the end of the school day, we hope they will have time to relax, and we hope they will do some "homework" as well.

Junior Elementary (6-9)

Our homework expectations for Junior Elementary children are as follows:

- Activities appropriate to family life and the home environment (see list below)
- Continuation of both academic work and self-development: A love of reading is the single best indicator of, and influence on, academic success. Reading and being read to daily are thus very important for elementary children. Sharing a joyful moment with your child can reinforce their love of learning.

Suggested Homework Activities:

- Go on a walk and talk about it later, over dinner: what we saw, how it felt, what animals, plants, etc., did we notice. That's language/vocabulary development, conversational skill development, relationship building, conversing with people of different ages, et cetera!
- Assist in meal planning, shop with a parent, count change or keep a tally of grocery costs, read a recipe, help prepare the meal
- Read to younger siblings
- Sort white clothes from dark clothes
- Prepare his/her own lunch
- Walk a well-behaved pet
- Play games together – through much repetition children learn to take turns, to win and lose
- Make a simple breakfast
- Set the table
- Clear the table and sponge it off
- Take out the garbage
- Take out the recycling
- Make the bed
- Clean the room
- Take phone messages and write them down
- Fold laundry
- Arrange clothing in drawers
- Hang up clothes in the closet
- Take care of pets
- Water plants

Senior Elementary (9–12)

All of the above, plus:

- Memorization of spelling words
- Memorization of math facts
- If possible, allow your child a plot of land, or at least a flowerpot, in which to experience growing things
- Plan menus for the upcoming week
- Write out a shopping list (as dictated by a parent)
- Take a calculator to the store and compare items (“How much will we save if we buy Brand X? Do we like Brand Y better? How much more sodium is in this one?”)
- Keep a record of family expenses for a week
- Sort clothes by color and learn to use the washing machine. Do her/his own laundry or some laundry for the family.
- Rake leaves, pull weeds
- Help an elderly neighbor (by taking a paper to the door, rolling a trashcan out to the street, etc.).

This list is meant to suggest possibilities. Children may be able to accomplish tasks at ages above or below those given. When making decisions about household responsibilities, keep the following principles in mind:

- It is best to involve children in identifying the work that needs to be done and in choosing who will be responsible for each job. (Not doing anything is not one of the choices!)
- Use common sense in deciding the number of tasks a child will do.
- He or she may wish to give input about which jobs can be accomplished efficiently alone and which would be more easily done with you or another family member. Remember the social nature of the elementary child: household jobs are more enjoyable when done with someone else. Your child may resent doing certain jobs alone but delight in doing them with you. It is also best if children help set the standards for the work and evaluate the completed job.
- Ask children to set an appropriate time limit for completing tasks.
- Vary the tasks: children like the challenge of a new or unusual job.

HOW TO REACH US

Escuela del Sol Office 505-242-3033
Friedje vanGils · Head of School/Executive Director, Escuela/Harwood: friedje@edelsol.org
Chris Loss · Business Manager, (520) 577-2739: chrisloss@edelsol.org
Elizabeth Marcilla · Assistant Head of School: elizabethm@edelsol.org
Dana McCabe · Early Childhood Programs Coordinator: dana@edelsol.org
Inga Tomlinson · Elementary Programs Coordinator: inga@edelsol.org
Tanesia Hale-Jones · Adolescent Programs Coordinator: tanesia@edelsol.org

Escuela Fax 1-800-317-4752

Harwood Art Center 505-242-6367
Julia Mandeville · Chief Program Officer: julia@harwoodartcenter.org
GuruAmrit Khalsa Smith: Administrative Services: guru@harwoodartcenter.org
Ebony Booth · Programs & Communications: ebony@harwoodartcenter.org

EMAIL:

Escuela: office@edelsol.org
Harwood: info@harwoodartcenter.org

WEBSITES:

Escuela, www.escueladelsol.org
Harwood, www.harwoodartcenter.org

EMERGENCY NUMBERS:

Joseph Marcilla, Facilities Manager 505-315-0033
Friedje vanGils, Head of School cell: 505-688-3844

See the Escuela and Harwood web pages for updates, monthly lunch menus, announcements, and more!

Stay in touch!