



2016-2017

Family Handbook

1370 Beech St.
East Lansing, MI 48823

(517) 336-0422

www.steppingstoneseastlansing.org

MISSION STATEMENT:

Our school community creates and maintains a learning environment that nurtures the development of the whole child.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK

Welcome to Stepping Stones Montessori School in East Lansing. The aim of this Parent/Guardian Handbook is to disseminate information concerning our programs as well as our school. We have endeavored to make this handbook as complete as possible. We trust that you will read the information carefully and contact the school if you have any questions or comments.

A signature sheet included in your family folder must be returned to the office. It will be our record that you have read and agree to comply with the contents in this packet.

I. ABOUT STEPPING STONES MONTESSORI SCHOOL IN EAST LANSING

PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS:

We, at Stepping Stones Montessori School in East Lansing, hereafter referred to as Stepping Stones Montessori, believe in providing an environment in which your child has the freedom to grow and learn in many areas: Practical Life Skills, Sensorial, Geography, History, Mathematics, Language, Cultural and Social. This prepared environment is suited to the child's physical, academic, emotional and social needs. We recognize the tremendous capacity and desire of children to discover and explore their environment. We make use of the fact that a child has sensitive periods for certain types of learning; periods which once past will never occur again in the same capacity. We allow children the freedom to learn in a safe and caring environment with direction and encouragement given by a very knowledgeable staff.

HISTORY OF OUR PROGRAM:

Stepping Stones Montessori was established in 1982 as a non-profit, non-discriminatory Preschool and Kindergarten. We are licensed by the State of Michigan (Department of Human Services) to care for children ages 12 months to 12 years. Like all Montessori programs, the classrooms follow a three-year cycle and thus, classrooms have children aged 12 mo-3 years, years 3 -6, 6-9, and 9-12 combined in each classroom. To the greatest degree possible, the classes are balanced in terms of age groupings and gender of the children. The Toddler House, located adjacent to the main school, was opened in the fall of 2004 to accommodate children ages 12 months to 3 years. Each primary and elementary classroom is staffed with a Montessori Guide holding a diploma from a certified Montessori training center and a related Master's or Bachelor's Degree. The Elementary Program was established in 1994 for children 6 to 12 years old.

THE MONTESSORI STAFF:

The Montessori Guide

The Montessori professional is referred to as a Guide rather than a teacher. His/her role in the classroom is to guide the child to various materials and their use. The children teach themselves. The Guide prepares and maintains the classroom with the help of the Assistants, parents and the children. S/he demonstrates materials and exercises, helps the child to find things of interest and provides a model for the child in speech and movement. S/he may frequently appear to be "uninvolved" with the children, while s/he is in fact observing where attention might be most needed and the level and type of work that individual children are pursuing with the self-teaching materials. The capacity to observe is one of the first jobs of the Montessori professional. The Montessori Guide allows the child to follow his/her own interests and capitalizes on these interests. The Montessori professional does not use rewards, pressure, or punishment to teach a child. Rather, s/he sets up and maintains guidelines to help the children gain an inner discipline.

The Assistant or Intern

The Montessori Guide demonstrates the initial use of the didactic equipment while the Assistant aides the child in following the ground rules and helps children with work that has been presented to them by the Guide. The Assistant assists children with practical life and art activities, outdoor clothing, as well as bathroom needs. (S)he also provides supervision at snack, lunch, and on the playground. The Assistant helps to prepare materials for demonstration and may also help with projects, songs, games and stories. The Intern performs the same duties as the Assistant and gradually takes over responsibilities of the Guide. Towards the end of the school year, the Intern may direct the classroom as a required part of the training.

THE CHILD'S RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Children are expected to observe the Ground Rules established and discussed with the children early in the year – with reminders as needed. We encourage you to ask your child about these rules and do what you can to reinforce them. Most of the rules are basic to their health and safety and the smooth operation of the classroom, such as walking instead of running or talking quietly rather than shouting. In addition, we adhere to a basic set of rights and responsibilities for the children.

Child's Rights:

Children are free to work with any material displayed.

Children may work on rugs or tables, whichever is suitable to the work chosen.

Children have the freedom to use the room as their need dictates with the above rights.

Children have the right to work undisturbed by others. They may initiate, complete and repeat an exercise alone without a break in concentration.

Children have the right to choose not to join in group activities. They may continue working on individual exercises or may stand apart to observe the group activities without actually participating.

Children have the right to work alone.

Children have the right to do nothing if they desire. They may observe, think quietly or just relax.

Child's Responsibilities:

Children must use material well without harming it or others. They may not use the materials in a way that disturbs the activities of others.

The child may not work on the shelves, as this may obstruct other children's access to materials.

Children have the responsibility for restoring the room during and after exercises – mopping their own spills, returning rugs and returning work to the appropriate shelf.

Children may not touch the work of another child without an invitation. Children are not allowed to interfere with another child's learning cycle. If one child leaves his/her work temporarily, he/she can continue later, confident that it will be as he/she left it.

Children are not allowed to interrupt or disrupt group activity that they have chosen not to join.

Children are not forced or even encouraged to share work. Generosity develops from within as a child matures and gains self-security. With adequate materials and group rules, sharing comes naturally.

Idleness is not allowed to disturb or distract other's activities.

DISCIPLINE IN THE MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENTS:

The Montessori Philosophy is based upon the principle of self-discipline that comes from within the child. The discipline is a product of the child's interaction with the adults, other children and the environment.

Ground Rules are chiefly the means by which self-discipline is obtained. Ground Rules for each classroom are very similar and are presented to the children from the first day of school. These rules and their significance are discussed with the whole group. Sometimes, the children rather than the adults make rules. It is shown that the rules are adhered to for the good of everyone.

Here are some examples of Ground Rules:

- I talk with an inside voice.
- I walk in the classroom and the hallway.
- My activities are done at a table or on a rug.
- My exercises are always returned to their proper place.
- I may invite another to work with me or I may say that I want to work alone.
- I sit on chairs, never on tables. (Parents, please keep this in mind while waiting in the hallway).

Reinforcement of the rules is necessary on an individual basis and with the whole group. This reinforcement is given through discussion or through a form of play-acting called “Grace and Courtesy Lessons”.

Our staff will use positive methods of discipline that encourages self-control, self-direction, positive self-esteem and cooperation. Acknowledgement of the child’s intentions and feelings is very helpful for the child. It is also important to provide a statement of logical consequences and to redirect the child towards another activity.

Example: “It looks like you are having fun, Johnny, but if you throw the blocks they might hit other children and hurt them. Let’s use the blocks on the floor and see what we can build!”

If, after being spoken to, an unacceptable behavior continues, the child will be redirected to another activity. If a child continues to have difficulty in disciplining him/herself, we may ask a child to take a moment to reflect and gather their emotions in a space that is safe. This time is intended to allow the child to calm and re-center him or herself. This will be used only as a last resort when the child is using aggressive behavior or allow a child who is angry or upset time to calm down. On occasion, parents will be contacted to arrange a special conference to discuss the continued behavior.

Stepping Stones Montessori DOES NOT use punitive methods of discipline and the children are never embarrassed or ridiculed.

PROGRAMS & HOURS:

Stepping Stones Montessori welcomes children 18mo – 6th grade. We are open from 7:30am – 6:00pm Monday through Friday throughout the school year with the exception of breaks as listed on the school calendar.

The School Day

Early Arrival: 7:30-8:30am

Toddler and Primary Base Program: 8:30am-12:00pm

Toddler and Primary Lunch/Nap: 12:00-3:30pm

Elder and Elementary Base Program: 8:30-3:30pm

Aftercare: 3:30-6:00pm

SCHOOL ATTIRE:

Children should come to school dressed to enjoy all types of activities: floor work, exploration of art media, water activities, gross motor skill activities and outdoor play. Our primary focus is for your child to enjoy him/herself while learning in the environment. At times, trying to keep clothes clean gets in the way of the activity. Parents are encouraged to bring a change of clothes when going somewhere directly from school where nice clothes are necessary. We cannot be held responsible for stained or damaged clothing.

Helpful Hints

- Clothing requiring as little help from adults as possible is less frustrating and most helpful to children.
- Since winter play is wet and at times muddy, you may consider a one-piece snowsuit that can remain at school throughout the week. Snow pants should be worn from the first snowfall through early spring.
- Keep in mind that some children will be removing outdoor shoes three or more times daily and may need assistance. We recommend a low, canvas or leather running shoe or oxford with Velcro, elastic, zipper or tie closings.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE PROCEDURES:

School Day Arrivals

IN ORDER TO RESPECT THE YOUNG CHILD'S CHARACTERISTIC TOWARD INDEPENDENCE, ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM ALONE.

Before Care

Students that need to arrive before 8:30am will be included in Before Care. This time will start at 7:30am. Before Care students can bring in a breakfast or morning snack in addition to their lunch for the day. We want to avoid students eating their lunch food in the mornings. This is a quiet time when students can choose work, socialize, read and have a peaceful start to their days.

Curbside Drop-Off: Toddler, Primary and Elementary

Each morning, Stepping Stones staff will be outside the building ready to welcome your child to school starting at 8:30am. Please utilize this service if at all possible. Your child begins their time of independence as they leave your car and enter the building with confidence. If you arrive earlier than 8:30, you can enter the school and drop your child off. Children that are enrolled in the Toddler Program should enter from the back of the Toddler House. The front door of the Toddler House will remain locked at all times.

Curbside Drop-Off Procedure: enter the parking lot via the north entrance on Lexington St, circle around following the cones and exit via the south Lexington St. entrance. At 8:30am, Stepping Stones staff will be ready to greet and open car doors for children. Please remain in your cars during this process. Doing so will help expedite the process and encourage independence. Drop off ends at 8:40am. If you do not want to participate in this system, you may park in front of the sidewalk in the central lines of parking spaces beyond the green electrical box. Please follow the sidewalk to the school entrance. Cutting across the drop off line is a safety hazard, please refrain from doing so.

School Day Departure

ONCE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN PICKED UP THEY MUST BE SUPERVISED BY PARENTS AT ALL TIMES AND MUST FOLLOW ALL SCHOOL POLICIES. WE ASK THAT IF YOU HAVE JUST PICKED UP ON THE PLAYGROUND THAT YOU EXIT THE PLAYGROUND THROUGH THE SCHOOL WITH YOUR CHILD. WE ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE SCHOOL.

It is the responsibility of Stepping Stones Montessori to make sure that no child is picked up without a staff member's knowledge and that no child is released to an unauthorized person. **Children will be dismissed only to authorized persons listed on the Child Information Card.** A written note should be given or signed FAX sent in conjunction with a phone call (in emergencies) if other arrangements are made for pick up.

12:00 or 3:30 - Primary and Toddler children

Notify staff that you are picking up your child and, your child should say goodbye to his/her teacher before leaving. If children are in a classroom please wait in the hallway or at the entrance of the Toddler House.

3:30 - Elementary children

Notify staff that you are picking up your child. If children are in a classroom please wait in the hallway.

3:30 – 6:00* - All children

Notify staff that you are picking up your child. If children are in a classroom you may enter the classroom.

*Primary and Elementary children may be on the playground or on a walk. The two parks that the primary and elementary children frequent are Stoddard Park (located two blocks west and ½ block south of our school) and Marble School Park (located on Burcham and Hagadorn behind Marble School; the children walk down Lexington Street). If the children are not on the playground, a note indicating their whereabouts will be posted on the school door.

ITEMS TO BRING TO SCHOOL

PLEASE LABEL YOUR CHILD'S EXTRA CLOTHING, INCLUDING SHOES AND WINTER GEAR. IF EXTRA CLOTHING IS USED PLEASE SEND ANOTHER SET OF EXTRA CLOTHES THE NEXT DAY.

Toddler

An extra set of clothes that have been labeled (shirt, underpants, pants, socks), diapers, wipes and indoor shoes in a plastic grocery bag. We will provide a container for your child's belongings.

Primary and Elementary

An extra set of clothes that have been labeled (shirt, underpants, pants, socks) all contained in a clear plastic shoebox. Children should wear shoes appropriate for running and other large motor activities and a 2nd pair of shoes to be worn only in the classroom. Please purchase shoes that are easy for the child to slip on and off. The clothes should be updated for season and size.

Rest and Nap Time

All children are required by the Health Department to have a rest time, but do not have to sleep. Children may bring in a small blanket and crib sheet for rest time. All nap materials must be small enough to fit neatly in a pillowcase or small bag. Any quilts, sleeping bags, large pillows, etc. will be given back to the parent in exchange for something smaller. You may check the chart in the nap room to see your child's rest/ nap time progress.

Special Notes

- Gum and throat lozenges are discouraged because of the potential choking (and cleaning) hazard these items could create.
- Please return any small objects that come home in pockets, even if they seem of no apparent value. Our classrooms offer many sorting and counting exercises in the classrooms and completeness is most important to the learning process.
- Children regularly ask to bring a favorite toy from home. Toys at school are discouraged because they can become lost, broken or coveted by other children. Instead, encourage your child to bring items of nature to school (e.g. shells, birds' nests, insect in a jar, flower, and unusual plants), books or an object from a recent trip.

SNACK:

Each primary and toddler classroom has a Snack Basket that your child will take home once or twice per school year for primary and 3 times per school year for toddlers to provide snack for one full week for the class. Along with the basket there will be a list with suggestions for snacks. A calendar will be sent home to notify parents in advance that the basket will be gracing their home soon. Elementary students are welcome to bring a snack from home to enjoy. The children are delighted by this special snack sharing and eagerly look forward to their turn with the basket.

The school provides the snack for children attending after 3:30. We ask that each family donate a special treat one time during the school year. Staff will coordinate this.

Allergies: With such a wide variety of food allergies our ability to meet the required health needs of all children for snack is very complex. We ask that children with specific food allergies provide an optional snack option to be kept here.

LUNCH:

Your child will need to bring a lunch if (s)he does not leave at noon. Please provide an ice pack for your child's lunch box if anything needs to be kept cold. Items that need *brief* warming (1 minute or less) can usually be accommodated.

We encourage children to eat all of their lunch and provide a quiet environment for them. A little note in the lunch box is a great way to greet your child midday. Children love to share these notes with their friends and staff.

In an effort to reduce our weekly trash and in coordination with our desire to spread the word about recycling to your children, we ask your cooperation with our lunch program. We ask that you pack:

- A cloth napkin
- Reusable eating utensils
- Reusable thermos or other drink container - juice boxes/packs should not be sent and will be returned to your child's lunchbox.
- Reusable, washable containers

Because we are teaching your children to recycle, please reflect on the packaging that you choose. All uneaten food, plastic wrap, napkin, thermos and utensils will be repacked in the lunch box to be returned home. This way you can see what your child has eaten for lunch and also how much trash was generated. Thank you for your cooperation and contribution to this important aspect of our program.

OUTDOOR TIME:

Outdoor playtime is an important and required part of our program R400.8170 (3). Children spend time outdoors daily unless it is extremely cold (below 10°F for primary or elementary; below 20°F for toddlers) or raining. Please keep your children at home who are not healthy enough to go outside. If your child has allergies or a medical condition that requires occasional rest indoors during outdoor play time, we will make a special accommodation. Children need to come to school in appropriate seasonal outdoor clothing. In the winter, this means winter coats, snow pants, boots, hats and mittens. To help eliminate loss, mittens should be attached to your child's jacket. Please clearly label all outdoor clothing. We are not responsible for lost clothing.

FIELD TRIPS:

Occasionally throughout the year children will be taken on field trips. These field trips serve as an extension of the Montessori curriculum, in which we want children to come to the understanding that learning is a life-long process, an extension of one's curiosity, and that it extends beyond the walls of the school. Due to the fluid nature of our curriculum, some of these trips may be impromptu, such as a quick trip to the library or out on a hike to gather plant specimens. The Guide(s) and Assistants in charge of a field trip will assume responsibility for chaperoning all students taking the field trip sometimes with the help of volunteers. By signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians agree not to hold Stepping Stones Montessori or any of its employees or volunteers responsible for occurrences other than those caused by the gross negligence of the school, its employees, and its volunteers or as otherwise provided by law.

Forms and Payment

Field trip forms and payment are to be returned to the office to be processed. If your account is in good standing you may also charge the cost of the field trip to your account.

Walking Trips

Sometimes children will be taken on short trips within walking distance from the school. The Guides and Assistants in charge of the trip will assume responsibility for providing reasonable chaperoning for all students taking the trip. Upon signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians give permission for their children to participate in walking field trips during the entire school year.

Bus Trips

Sometimes the children, Guides, Assistants and, when appropriate, volunteers will use the CATA bus system for field trips. Again, the staff, in charge of the trip, and volunteer(s) will assume responsibility for providing reasonable chaperoning for all students taking the trip. In signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians give permission for their children to participate in field trips using bus transportation during the entire school year.

Private Cars

No one under the age of 18 may be a volunteer driver. A volunteer driver may be a parent or other adult who has passed both the Central Registry and ICHAT background investigations conducted by Stepping Stones Montessori, has provided proof of insurance and valid driver's license, has signed the Field Trip Transportation Form, and has received permission from the Head of School to drive students on field trips during the specified school year.

Transportation for field trips and extracurricular activities is sometimes provided by volunteers and/or staff members in private cars. Any damages resulting from personal injuries sustained by adults or children due to the volunteer's ownership, operation or maintenance of the vehicle used must be recovered through the driver's personal insurance coverage of the passenger.

Stepping Stones Montessori provides liability coverage for its staff members, but no insurance coverage or liability for the ownership, maintenance, operational expense or any injury or damages to persons, students or the property of others that may occur from the use of a non-school vehicle.

By signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians provide consent for their children to ride with a volunteer and/or staff member driver on field trips during the school year.

TOILET TRAINING/DIAPERING:

Primary

It is expected that your child be toilet trained before entering the Primary Program. This means using cloth underpants: no *Pull-Ups*, and the child not regularly needing bathroom reminders. If wetting becomes a habitual problem, it may be necessary for your child to stay home from school until your child is fully potty trained.

Toddler

- Toilet training will be planned and carried out cooperatively between parents and staff. Training will begin when child appears ready. A child generally does not have muscle control needed to start toilet training until about 18 months. The child must be able to walk and talk. Children will be left to sit on the toilet for brief periods only (no longer than five minutes). Praise will be given for successes. Words for toileting will be chosen with the parents and used consistently. Bowel training will usually be first. The child's normal pattern will be noted to determine times to attempt toileting. Bladder training will usually be second. A child should have dry diapers for two-hour intervals before starting bladder training. Children having "accidents" will be treated in a positive manner. We will reassure and never force.
- Soiled clothing and diapers will not be washed out at the school. They will be placed in sealed plastic bags, labeled and sent home daily.
- Diapering of toddlers will be done as needed throughout the day. Parents/guardians must provide diapers (disposable or from a commercial diaper service) and baby wipes. Only creams, lotions, and powders provided by parents will be used and only when accompanied by the Topical/Non-Prescription form. The changing area will be cleaned and sanitized after each diaper change. Supplies will be kept in a cupboard at the changing area. Diapering procedures are posted in the toileting area. A record of diapering will be kept for parents/guardians to view.

BIRTHDAYS:

On, or near, a student's birthday (or half-birthday in the case of summer birthdays), we love to celebrate. Montessori provides a special way to celebrate which includes the birthday walk (showing how many times a child has gone around the sun), a poem, song and the showing of a timeline of the child's life. Parents are invited to join us for this celebration as are siblings. You will receive a note a week or so before your child's birthday to set a day and time for the celebration. We will go through the various steps of the celebration and parents will be invited to share a few stories about their child. If your child would like to bring a snack of fruits or vegetables to share with their classmates at lunch, please drop it off with him/her in the morning. Check with your child's Guide for specific information regarding birthday protocol in the classroom.

If you choose to have a party for your child outside of school, invitations to parties may be distributed in class ONLY if the entire class is invited. We understand that you may not be able to invite every child, however, in those cases we ask that you send your invitations to those children outside of school. The children are very aware of when they are not invited and feel excluded when they don't receive an invitation. The school directory is emailed out at the beginning of each school year and can be provided as needed.

PHOTOGRAPHY OF CHILDREN:

Throughout the year other students, parents, staff and occasionally the local media may photograph children. These photographs may be used in school publications or community publications. Our student photographers choose shots at random and we rely on parent photos as well. This creates a mixed collection of shots from all age levels. We never intentionally highlight or omit a particular child through our photography. If you are opposed to your child's photograph being used in school publications or student picture boards, please sign a waiver in the office. We will review all waivers before publishing. If we do not have a waiver on file we will assume that we have your permission to use photography that includes your child in our school publications. No person may post children's photographs on the web (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or submit them to outside organizations, without the written consent of the parent or guardian.

II. PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

OBSERVATION POLICY:

Parents are always welcome to stop by the classroom at any time. However, please bear in mind that Stepping Stones Montessori is your child's school. The more adults present in the classroom, the more disruptive it will be to their day. An appointment for observation will control the amount of visitors in the classroom. We encourage at least a one-day notice for observations. Also, please note that observations will not be scheduled until after the first month of school; this allows the classroom to become established and begin to "normalize".

When in the classroom, please be mindful of adult conversations when children are present. In the afternoon, we encourage your participation with the children at this time of day by observing their play and playing with them and reading to them. At times, the children may remind you of the classroom rules, e.g., we sit on the floor or on a chair, we speak with a quiet voice, we make sure our shoes are clean and dry in the classroom.

SCHOOL-TO-HOME COMMUNICATIONS:

We hold your child in the highest regard and want to work with you to maintain open lines of communication. In order to establish clear communication between Stepping Stones Montessori and parents/guardians, throughout the year we will use the following: We ask that parents/guardians read the parent/guardian information handbook, newsletters, the bulletin boards, and attend parent/guardian meetings.

- **Parent/Guardian-Guide Conferences:** There are two formal conferences held each year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The Guide is also available for a conference if given advanced notice.
- **Newsletters:** These are issued periodically by the classroom Guide.
- **Handouts:** These are usually issued before events and used as reminders of items mentioned in the newsletter. Some handouts require a parental/guardian response whether or not you will attend. Please respond in a timely manner. All notes will be placed in the family mailboxes in the foyer thus you should check your mailbox daily.
- **Email Parent List:** Much of the school information is sent to your specified email address. This information will not replace certain notes, handouts, etc. placed in the family mailboxes. Please give your e-mail address to the office staff and update it as necessary.
- **Bulletin Boards:** General school postings and local events are listed on the school bulletin boards.
- **School Calendar of Events & Special Dates:** Calendars for all-school and classroom-specific events are maintained through the CALENDARS tab on our website: www.steppingstoneseastlansing.org.
- **Parent/Guardian Education Opportunities** - Montessori philosophy, curriculum and child development issues are discussed at these events. We seek a partnership relationship with parents/guardians and value your ideas. Your attendance at these meetings serves as a way for you to foster your child's educational growth and build community with other parents and staff.

Communication with Your Child's Guide

We encourage parent/guardian participation at Stepping Stones Montessori; your input is always welcome. While our entry procedure promotes independence in the children by allowing them to enter the classroom on their own, and allows the Guide to concentrate on getting the children started with their work, it does reduce the possibilities for parent/staff communication. The emphasis is that children should say their goodbyes at the door and enter the room on their own. At times it may be necessary to communicate immediate information relating to the child. If this is the case, please allow the child to enter as usual and bring the problem to the attention of the Assistant or the Head of School in the office. If the urgent communication needs to be addressed to the child's Guide, the Assistant or Head of School will substitute for the Guide so that the communication can take place outside of the classroom.

Parents/Guardians should also be responsible for contacting the Guide and/or Head of School regarding any problems, concerns or complaints that may arise during the year. All issues will be openly discussed and addressed in order that the problem or concern may be resolved. PLEASE KEEP COMMUNICATION WITH THE STAFF OPEN.

PROCEDURE FOR CLASSROOM QUESTIONS & CONCERNS:

- Schedule a classroom observation followed by a discussion with the Guide.
- If further discussion is needed, make an appointment through the office to meet with your child's Guide to address the concern and work towards resolution.
- If after your discussions with the Guide you still have concerns, make an appointment with the Head of School to work towards a resolution within an agreed upon time frame.
- If resolution is not achieved in an agreed upon time frame, the parents/guardians, Guide, and the Head of School shall meet within one week. At this time a definitive decision will be made regarding this concern.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND FEE PROGRAM:

Volunteer Opportunities

Our children participate in the care of their Casa as a part of their lessons in practical life: they wash windows, chairs, tables and they sweep, polish and fold laundry. They take pride in their work and in knowing that they are contributing to the preservation of their environment. A parent's involvement in the school helps a child develop more pride in his/her school and classroom and provides immense joy to the child. Any special talent that you are willing to share with the children is greatly appreciated. Art projects, sewing, storytelling, baking, singing, bringing in artifacts, sharing some aspect of your occupation, chaperoning field trips, leading reading groups, participating on the Fundraising Committee or the Board of Directors, and beautifying our buildings and grounds are all ways that you can serve our children. On a regular basis you can also volunteer for class jobs, such as laundry, recycling, shopping, etc. You will find sign-up sheets posted outside each of the classrooms. We ask that each family sign up for one classroom job per year.

Fee Program

We understand that all of our families have different constraints on their time and finances, thus families are given the choice between donating 16 hours of their time to the school during the course of the school year or paying a \$256 fee.

Volunteer hours must be logged on the volunteer slips provided by the office and returned in to the tuition box. If a family is unable to donate the full 16 hours during the course of the year, that family's \$256 fee will be charged at the end of the year in May 2017. For families starting **AFTER** September the hours are reduced by 2 hours for each month prior to enrollment.

Standard Volunteer Activities and Hours	
Volunteer Activity	Standard Hours
Laundry	1 hour
Bringing flowers	.5 hour
Shopping for pet food	.5 hour
Bringing library books for class	1 hour
Cutting paper	1.5 hours
Misc. shopping	1 hour
School events	Varies
Providing snacks for hot lunch/aftercare	.5 hours
Driving for field trips	Varies

Parent Education Opportunities

We expect Stepping Stones Montessori parents to participate in a minimum of TWO parent education events in the school year. Any participation in parent education opportunities will be counted towards volunteer hours.

Examples of Parent Education Events	
Education Activity	Event Occurrence
Maren Schmidt: Seeing your Child the Montessori Way.	Online Lessons (\$197.00) This course will complete your required parent education hours.
Montessori 101	One hour
Montessori at Home	One hour
Grace and Courtesy	One hour
Elementary First Friday	One-time acknowledgement for one hour
Presentation Night	One hour
International Fair	One hour
Additional Parent Education Workshops	TBA

CLEARANCE AND SUPERVISION OF VOLUNTEERS:

Department of Human Services Central Registry Clearance and Michigan Internet Criminal History Access Tool (ICHAT) Verification for Volunteers

The Michigan Child Protection Law, MCL 722.625 *et seq.*, requires the Department of Human Services (DHS) to maintain a Central Registry of perpetrators of child abuse and neglect. In accordance with DHS licensing rules, and because the safety of our students is of paramount importance, Stepping Stones Montessori requires that all adults who work with children have a Central Registry Clearance Form on file with the school. If you are interested in volunteering with the school, please ask the office for a Request for Central Registry Clearance (DHS-194). Fill out the form, attach a copy of your driver's license or State identification and give the form to the Head of School or her designee.

In addition, Stepping Stones Montessori requires that all adults who work with children have a criminal background check using the ICHAT system operated by the Michigan State Police. If you are interested in volunteering with the school, please provide the Head of School with your full name, date of birth, and any name(s) you have used in the past.

The Head of School will report any adverse information to the volunteer applicant. Volunteers should be aware that there are errors in the Central Registry and ICHAT databases. If you feel that there is an error about your background in the Central Registry or ICHAT database, please ask the Head of School for information on how to correct the error. All volunteer information from the Central Registry and ICHAT will be kept confidential by the school.

Volunteers New to the State of Michigan

All volunteers who have not lived in Michigan for the past 10 years must provide criminal history check from the previous state(s).

Signed Statement

All volunteers must sign a statement indicating whether s/he has been convicted of any crimes other than a traffic violation along with any details of the conviction.

Supervision of Volunteers

As stated above, all volunteers who work with children must have a Central Registry Clearance Form on file with the school and have completed an ICHAT criminal background check. If your name is not on the registry or in the ICHAT system, you will be eligible to work as a volunteer. If your name is on the registry or in the ICHAT system, or if you are not willing to submit for clearance, you will not be able to volunteer at the school. Ultimately, the Head of School will determine whether or not someone who has a Clearance Form on file and whose name was not in the ICHAT system may volunteer at the school. The goal is to create an environment that is safe for our children.

All volunteers must check in at the front office and with a Guide in the classroom of the children with whom the volunteer will be working. At the end of the volunteer experience, the volunteer should report to a Guide in the classroom to say that the volunteer is leaving.

Any volunteer who will be taking children away from the school building must work with staff to ensure that the volunteer is taking only the children s/he has been assigned to take. The volunteer must take the copies of the Emergency Cards for the children in his/her care and keep them with him/her the entire time the children are in his/her care. The volunteer is encouraged to have accessible a means, such as a mobile phone, to contact the school or emergency personnel, if necessary. At the end of the volunteer experience, the volunteer must report to a Guide to ensure that all of the children are safely returned to the care of the school.

Health of Volunteers

Any volunteers who regularly volunteer more than four (4) hours per week working directly with the children will provide a signed note from his/her physician indicating that the volunteer is free from communicable tuberculosis, verified within 1 year before employment or volunteering, R400.8128.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS:

At Stepping Stones Montessori, we only choose fundraisers that are consistent with our school values. We particularly value those fundraisers that include the participation of the children for direct experiences with real-world learning environments, as well as fundraising events that build our community. As a non-profit institution, we rely on fundraising for financial support. Fundraising each year will be used for our school's growth and improvement for obtaining valuable 'extras' for our children. Overall, we strive to make our program as affordable as possible as well as minimizing the total number of fundraisers we hold. We encourage new fundraising ideas from our families. Your participation in the functioning of these events are an ideal way to achieve your volunteer opportunities. Many families exceed their volunteer hours through the help in planning, preparing, and running a fundraising event.

Annual Giving at Stepping Stones Montessori

We value and appreciate the engagement of all the families in our community through our fundraisers and your generous donations. The Stepping Stones Montessori environment cannot thrive without your continuous involvement. We have a strong group of families, friends and alumni in our school and many ask, "What can I do?" We ask each family for a tax-deductible donation during the year to ensure that we can keep tuition as low as possible to make the school affordable for as many families as we can.

"There are many important causes in our communities to which we give our time and financial support, but the most important investment that we can make in our lifetime is in our own children's future. Fostering a love for learning at a young age and nurturing our children to become responsible, productive, and compassionate adults may be the greatest gift we can provide this and future generations. **In the spirit of helping our children grow and fulfill their destiny, we hope you will consider supporting Stepping Stones with a gift to the Annual Fund this year.**

Stepping Stones needs your help to provide each child with the space and place to continue their quest for knowledge, understanding, and discovery. Like most independent schools, tuition alone does not cover the full cost of a child's education. Stepping Stones relies on the kindness and generosity of philanthropic support to bridge the budget gap, keep tuition affordable, and provide for the projects and programs that assist in creating a learning environment that nurtures the development of the whole child. An investment in Stepping Stones is an investment in the future because it helps us to consistently provide the attention and nurturing that is the foundation of a Montessori education. Your additional financial support is both an act of "giving back" as well as a thoughtful effort to "pay forward" for those children who will benefit from the education that you helped build and preserve.

As you consider your philanthropic giving, please remember that gifts to Stepping Stones Montessori will keep it an exceptional place to educate children and free their potential. No contribution is too small to help us meet our goals. Broad participation with these efforts helps us know that our community is engaged and excited."

*written by Kelly Fienberg, a Stepping Stones Montessori parent of five years
from a letter on Annual Giving*

III. Health and Safety

HEALTH:

Sickness Procedure

Please call the school if your child will not be in on a scheduled day. The following guidelines have been established, not to inconvenience you, but to protect other children who will be susceptible to the following contagions. Most importantly, if your child is ill, s/he will feel much more comfortable being tended to at home.

PLEASE DO NOT BRING YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL WHEN S/HE IS SICK.

Children having any of the following symptoms should not come to school AND parents need to let the office know by email.

- Fever over 100° F axillary (armpit) or 101° F orally
- Has been on antibiotics less than 24 hours
- Excessive cough and/or nasal discharge
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea – if two cases of diarrhea occur parents will be notified. Usually contagious and potentially dangerous
- Unidentified rash – should be investigated by a physician
- Eye discharge –conjunctivitis is very contagious and may be either bacterial or viral
- Upper respiratory infections and sore throat – parents of a child with a viral respiratory infection should rely on all applicable guidelines to determine when to return to school. Children with a bacterial respiratory

infection including: tonsillitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, strep throat, or otitis media (ear infection), that is being treated with antibiotics should be on the prescription for 24 hours before returning to school.

If any of the above symptoms develop while your child is attending school, you or your emergency person, (listed on Child Information Card) will be notified to come for your child.

Please allow a period of 24 hours to pass after the last incident of vomiting, diarrhea, etc. before returning to school.

When a case of a communicable disease (e.g. strep throat, pink-eye, and fifth disease) is reported to the school, a note is posted to inform you of your child's exposure.

Medication Policy

Whether prescription or non-prescription, medication is administered to a child only upon written request of the parent. The medication must be in the original container with the child's name and directions clearly labeled. Following are the procedures used:

- Parent/guardian completes and signs Medication Permission & Instructions form (BCAL 1243)
- Parent/guardian brings medication with medication release form to the **OFFICE**
- A staff person administers all medication, logs information and then places it with other medications

NOTES ON SAFETY:

It is the responsibility of Stepping Stones Montessori to make sure that no child is picked up without a staff member's knowledge and that no child is released to an unauthorized person. **Children will be dismissed only to authorized persons listed on the Child Information Card.** A written note should be given or signed FAX sent in conjunction with a phone call (in emergencies) if other arrangements are made for pick up.

CHILD INFORMATION CARDS:

It is the parents' responsibility to keep the Child Information Card updated with current emergency numbers and health care information. Notify the school as to your location on any particular day if other than the phone numbers on the Child Information Card. Cards must be updated ANNUALLY.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES:

Posted in each room is a copy of Stepping Stones' Emergency Response Procedures. Please feel free to familiarize yourself with this document.

BAD WEATHER:

Parents are advised to listen to radio/TV announcements of Stepping Stones Montessori in East Lansing school closings. Our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/SteppingStonesMontessoriSchoolInEastLansing>) and our website (<http://steppingstoneseastlansing.org/>) will keep you up-to-date on school closings due to weather conditions. We will also send email updates.

If bad weather occurs after the school day has begun, the sessions will continue as usual through the scheduled dismissal times. Any parent who wishes to come early to pick up his/her child may do so.

In an emergency that is serious enough to close the school, parents/guardians or designated emergency contact persons will be notified by telephone.

IV. Enrollment & Tuition:

ENROLLMENT POLICY:

It is the policy of Stepping Stones Montessori to enroll children committed to the three-year cycle on a first-come, first-serve basis for children, with consideration of gender and age and the space in each classroom. Priority is given to siblings of children already in attendance. In order to finalize an application, a signed enrollment contract and a \$200

non-refundable application fee are required. Both parents and children are encouraged to meet with the staff before the first day of attendance.

TUITION POLICY:

The payment schedule of Stepping Stones Montessori is based on tuition for a school year from September until June. There are nine monthly payments of tuition, which are due on the first of each month, August through April. Tuition can be paid online through Tuition Express, credit card, check, cash or money order. Checks are to be written to: Stepping Stones Montessori. You may sign up for a Tuition Express account, the online payment system, by filling out some paperwork and submitting to our bookkeeper.

Mail the payment or place it in the locked box marked *Tuition* in the hallway just outside the office. In memo area of check please indicate how to apply payment. PLEASE DO NOT HAND CHECKS TO OTHER STAFF MEMBERS as they may be misplaced. You will receive an invoice by email on the first of every month and will be responsible for making the payments prior to the 10th of every month. A receipt may be obtained from the office.

LATE FEES:

Late Payments - Monthly payments are considered late after the tenth of the month. A \$50 late fee, or 25% of the overdue payment, will be added to payments after this date. In order for us to meet our many financial obligations, we must insist on prompt payment of tuition bills according to the terms of the parent/school agreement. Payments overdue by 30 days may result in cancellation of enrollment of your child until payment is made. Parents will be notified in writing of overdue tuition. If a payment will be late please contact the Business Manager to make special arrangements. All families are required to have a credit card or bank account on file. If tuition reaches two months overdue, the account will be charged.

Pick-up After Closing - If a child is not picked up by the school closing time of 6:00 p.m. a flat fine of \$10 will be charged for the first ten minutes and \$1 for each additional minute past the first ten minutes. There will be no discounts off this charge.

OTHER FEES/CHARGES:

- **Returned Checks** - There is a \$50 fee for returned checks.
- **Drop In Care** – Please see the drop-in care pricing and procedures sheet.
- **Credit Card Processing Fee** – There is a 3.5% processing fee for credit card.

INACTIVE ACCOUNTS:

- Tuition accounts which have an outstanding balance after the fiscal school year (currently July 31st) will be classified as “inactive” and turned over to a collection agency after three written notices (requesting payment of the total outstanding balance) have been mailed to the address on file.
- Tuition accounts which have a credit balance and have had no activity for a period of one year will be deemed as “inactive” and monies from such accounts will become the property of Stepping Stones Montessori. Three written notices will be mailed to the address on file before such action is taken.

TERMINATION:

The school reserves the right to terminate this contract, for any reason, including if the Guide along with Head of School determines that the child is not thriving in this school’s environment. Parents/guardians will be informed immediately of any problems and will be asked to work with the Guide and child to bring resolution. The right to terminate will only be taken after all possible attempts to address the issue(s) have been pursued. Termination of a contract will take effect immediately.

The parent may cancel this contract **with a minimum of 30 days written notice prior to the date of withdrawal** given to the office. Tuition **payments are expected in full for the month** regardless of when the child is withdrawn. If less than 30 day notice is given then payment for the following month’s tuition will be the parent/guardian’s responsibility to pay. The first semester is considered to be from the beginning of the school year up to the winter break. The second semester is considered to be from January 1 through the end of the school year.

SCHOOL CLOSING:

No tuition refunds will be given for unscheduled closings, such as snow days, power failure or the like. Families are not eligible for refunds for days that the child does not attend due to illness or vacation.

TAX INFORMATION:

An end of the year tax statement, to verify tuition for income tax purposes, may be obtained from the office. The Employer Identification Number of Stepping Stones Montessori School is:

EIN # 38-2419295

Please notify the office if you will need a monthly receipt for payment of your child's tuition. Reimbursement forms from employers will be signed after tuition has been paid.

LICENSING NOTEBOOK:

There shall be a licensing notebook on the premises which includes all licensing inspection and special investigation reports and related corrective action plans since May 28, 2010 and a summary sheet outlining the documents contained in the notebook. The notebook shall be made available to parents and prospective parents at all times during the center's normal hours of operation.