FAMILY HANDBOOK

SY 2026 - 2027

SUSSEX MONTESSORI
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

Welcome from the Head of School

Welcome to Sussex Montessori School!

It is my great privilege to welcome you and your family to our school community. Thank you for entrusting us with one of life's greatest responsibilities - the education, care and development of your child. We are truly honored that you have chosen Sussex Montessori School to be part of your family's journey! At Sussex Montessori, we believe every child possesses extraordinary potential. Our responsibility is to create an environment where that potential can flourish academically, socially, emotionally and personally. We are committed to providing a safe, joyful and intellectually engaging learning community where children are encouraged to think critically, solve problems creatively, develop independence and discover the joy of learning.

As Dr. Maria Montessori reminds us,

"The greatest gifts we can give our children are the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence."

Our mission extends far beyond academic achievement. We seek to nurture curiosity, character, compassion, resilience and a lifelong love of learning. We want every child to leave Sussex Montessori not only with a strong academic foundation, but also with the confidence and integrity to make a positive difference in the world. We know that children thrive when families and schools work together. Open communication, mutual respect and a shared commitment to each child's success are the foundation of our partnership. As a school, we are also committed to continuous improvement - reflecting on our practices, strengthening instruction and always seeking better ways to serve our students and families.

This handbook provides important information about our policies, procedures, and expectations. I encourage you to read it carefully and keep it as a resource throughout the school year. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out. I also invite you to visit our website and follow our social media pages to celebrate the many wonderful moments that make Sussex Montessori such a special place. Thank you for becoming part of our school family. We look forward to partnering with you as we help your child grow in knowledge, character, confidence and compassion. Together, we will continue building a community where every child is known, valued, challenged and inspired to reach their fullest potential.

Siza Mtimbiri
Head of School
Sussex Montessori School

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School Schedule and Calendar

START DATES:

- Tuesday, September 1st for Kindergarten Students
- Thursday, September 3rd for students new to Sussex Montessori
- Tuesday, September 8th for all Students

DAILY SCHEDULE:

- 7:45 am: Drop-off Begins
- 8:00 am: School Day Starts
- 3:00 pm: School Day Ends
- 3:00pm: Car Pick-up Begins

Full Year Calendar:

For a full year calendar that includes special events and school closures, please refer to the 2026-2027 School Year Calendar that was enclosed in the August mailing or visit our website: https://sussexmontessoricharter.com/calendar-info/.

The calendar will be updated throughout the year, so please pay attention to messages from your teacher, the Head of School, the school-wide newsletter, and school-wide announcements for these revisions. You can also check the website monthly, where schedule highlights will be on the homepage, https://sussexmontessoricharter.com/ .

General Information

Mission & Vision

Our Mission
The mission of the Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is to nurture the development of empathetic, collaborative, persistent and innovative global and community citizens in accordance with the time-tested philosophy of Maria Montessori.

Our Vision
The Vision of the Sussex Montessori School (SMS) is to use the Montessori method to educate children through authentic personalized learning experiences, respectful relationships, opportunities to innovate, and a focus on global citizenship. We believe that the creation of a Montessori public school in Sussex County, DE will improve student learning, allow for greater choice for parent/guardian/guardians, and serve as a model for alternative approaches to education by providing a proven and innovative teaching and learning environment.

As a charter school, we are given the flexibility to create our own educational model while also being held to a high level of accountability from the State of Delaware Department of Education. We work closely with other Montessori charter schools and are committed to partnering with our local community partners and the larger education community. As a school community, we are dedicated to cultivating and maintaining an academically rich environment that is joyful and welcoming and allows every child within our community to grow to their fullest potential. Sussex Montessori is a school developing the whole child!

Background

Sussex Montessori School (SMS) was born from two local organizations coming together to address grave needs in Sussex County. In 2014, the Longwood Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to systemic investments through the state of Delaware, put forth a call for action to address the need for a choice school model for underserved families in rural southern Delaware. Aware of the successes of Montessori throughout the state, the Longwood Foundation supported Montessori Works in the early phases of school development. Both organizations began to engage community members with various backgrounds to develop a comprehensive school

plan and design. Many of these individuals had previous experience as Montessori educators and parent/guardian/guardians. The creation of Sussex Montessori's founding board was established by these dedicated community members.

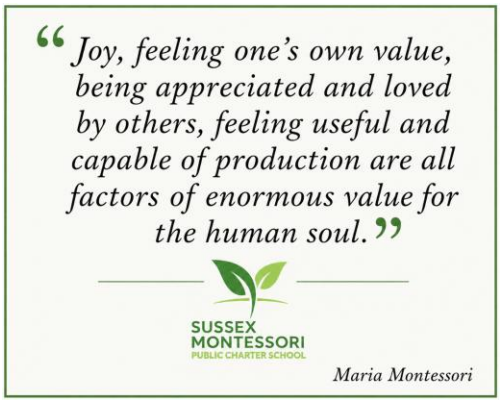
As a school, Sussex Montessori opened its doors to students in grades K-3 in the fall of 2020 with 10 classrooms and 260 students. Over the next three years, Sussex added additional classrooms and additional grade levels, with our first group of sixth graders graduating in 2024. The 2026 – 2027 school year will be our seventh year of operation and will be the first year where we will have students who will graduate as 6th graders who started as Kindergartners.

Educational Philosophy

The Montessori method fosters rigorous, self-motivated growth for children and adolescents in all areas of their development – cognitive, emotional, social, and physical. To implement this philosophy, Sussex Montessori School (SMS) will:

- Create a challenging interdisciplinary curriculum combining the Delaware Core Standards with Montessori lessons.
- Provide an abundance of learning materials specifically developed for the Montessori classroom.
- Empower the child to direct his/her own learning within the structure of the curriculum and with close guidance by the teacher.
- Facilitate inquiry, exploration, critical thinking, collaboration, and creative problem solving.
- Understand and capitalize on individual learning styles.
- Educate the whole child by infusing the development of self-reliance and independence within academic work.
- Understand and celebrate the diversity that makes Sussex Montessori School so unique.

Characteristics of a Montessori Education



Multi-Age Classrooms are two and three-year age spans: 5-7, 7–9 and 9-12-year-olds in the Upper Elementary program. This maximizes curriculum options, encourages cooperation, and fosters self-confidence by allowing children to sometimes lead and sometimes follow.

Montessori Materials focus on many levels of understanding, beginning with the concrete and moving to the abstract. Materials are self-correcting and reinforce autonomy, confidence, and self-motivation.

Uninterrupted Work Periods enable students to explore a topic or material thoroughly. Whole-class instruction is minimal, individual and small group are preferred. Uninterrupted work periods encourage concentration and increases stamina.

Mastery Learning goes beyond memorization and repetition to true understanding and application of knowledge, skills, and concepts. Rather than simply covering concepts in a predetermined order, our curriculum maps identify learning goals for each level, and our teachers have the flexibility to present concepts that suit the learning needs and styles of each student. Rather than structuring the day to assign a limited amount of time to each subject area, our Montessori approach provides both students and teachers with flexibility in the time they choose to devote to any given pursuit. When a student, or group of students, demonstrates a particular interest in exploring a concept, question, or issue more deeply, the Montessori philosophy calls for teachers to facilitate such interests. Individual students progress at their own rate, either moving ahead without having to wait for the rest of the group or taking the time needed to internalize the material or concept.

Collaboration is encouraged, and students frequently work together on assignments. Though direct instruction is provided to every student every day, students spend a large portion of the learning time working with each other. This approach not only fosters collaboration but also provides students the opportunity to articulate their thinking to others, which helps to deepen their comprehension.

Peace Education is integral to the Montessori method and is woven all throughout the Sussex Montessori curriculum beginning with our morning meetings and including our lessons on “grace and courtesy” which guides and supports children to be respectful and at peace with themselves and with others.

Family Engagement and Investment

Our intention is to honor and include all those who devote their time, attention, and love to raise the children in our care at Sussex Montessori School. Whether you are a parent, grandparent, guardian, or caregiver - you are welcome. It is our hope at SMS that you are involved with our school in a way that is meaningful to you and positively impacts our students. Each family is asked to do what they can - we have no required number of hours but instead ask that you participate as often as you can and contribute when and where

you are able. Not only does your involvement help our community, but you serve as a powerful role model for our students. You are always welcome!

Volunteering Policies
In-person volunteers play an important role in the success of our students and school. To ensure the safety of our students and staff, all volunteers need to complete the required forms (found on our website). These forms authorize the school to complete a thorough background screening of prospective volunteers.

This policy applies to all school activities during the school day, except for parents/guardians or adults who are visiting the school as an audience member for a class or school presentation.

***Required Forms for Volunteers*:**
To access all required forms, please visit https://sussexmontessoricharter.com/volunteer/

- Volunteer Enrollment and Disclosure Form
- Department of Education Tuberculosis Health Questionnaire
- Delaware Child Protection Registry Request Form

Forms must be turned into the office and processed prior to volunteering. All forms will be treated and stored confidentially by the Sussex Montessori Staff and Board of Directors. Please allow at least 30 days for us to submit and process your forms as they are submitted to outside agencies. Volunteering begins once all forms are processed.

Note: All volunteers must submit the Volunteer Enrollment and Disclosure Form. Please get involved!

Who to contact to get involved:

Department	Name	Email
After School Clubs	Jonas Geneste and RJ Johnson	jonas.geneste@sussexms.k12.de.us
		ronald.johnson@sussexms.k12.de.us

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)	Siza Mtimbiri	siza.mtimbiri@sussexms.k12.de.us
Enrollment	Kaneisha Savage	kaneisha.savage@sussexms.k12.de.us
Food Services & Student Health	Anita Mitchell	Anita.mitchell@sussexms.k12.de.us
Homelessness Liaison	Brandy Walker	brandy.walker@sussexms.k12.de.us
Medical Related Services	Aimee Carter	aimee.carter@sussexms.k12.de.us
Multiple Language Learners	Anna Ornelas	anna.ornelas@sussexms.k12.de.us
Special Education	Courtney White	courtney.white@sussexms.k12.de.us
Student Behavior Support	George Waters	george.waters@sussexms.k12.de.us
Teaching and Learning	Peter McClure	peter.mcclure@sussexms.k12.de.us
Title I	Kaneisha Savage	kaneisha.savage@sussexms.k12.de.us
Transportation	Kaneisha Savage	kaneisha.savage@sussexms.k12.de.us

Family Investment

Families are welcome to reach out to teachers and staff at any time. We are here to ensure that all families have the information they need with respect to their child. Teachers will respond within 24-48 hours. Email is the preferred method of contact. If it is an emergency, please call the office at 302-404-5367.

Student performance will be shared in a variety of ways throughout the year:

- Progress Reports are shared three times a year through Transparent Classroom, an online communication tool designed specifically for Montessori schools.
- Three in person conferences that you sign up for at designated time,
- Weekly updates will be sent from classrooms.
- Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 meetings will be held as required for children with special needs.

Parent/guardian Engagement Opportunities:

- Fundraising, parent/guardian engagement, and staff appreciation (Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) volunteers)
- Field Trip Chaperones
- Classroom volunteers and mentors
- Special event helpers
- Parent/guardian Camp

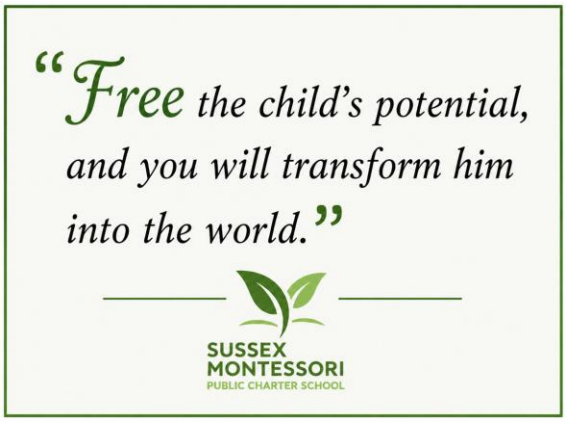
Parent/guardian Education Opportunities:

- Open House
- Parent Camp and Parent/Guardian Education

Parent/guardian Responsibilities for Supporting Children's Learning:

- **Ensure that your child is on time for school and ready to learn**
- Ensure that your child gets a good night sleep, plenty of exercise and nutritious meals
- Read together every day
- Attend all parent/guardian/teacher conferences and end of the year portfolio presentations
- Read and review student reports
- Read weekly classroom newsletters
- Assist students in completing outside of school activities
- Attend Open House
- Volunteer at Sussex Montessori School
- Review the Family Handbook

Visiting Sussex Montessori During the School Day



<u>*Scheduled Visits*</u>*:*
If you have a scheduled visit to the school (volunteering in the classroom, conference, meeting, etc.) you will need to first sign in at the Front Office. Your child's teacher will inform the Front Office ahead of time. ***Please be prepared to present your license*** in exchange for a visitor tag which will need to be returned to the office when your visit is complete.

<u>*Unscheduled visits*</u>*:*
If you are stopping by the school unexpectedly, you will need to sign in at the Front Office ***first***. Once signed in, a member of our office staff will call the person you are visiting to

determine their availability. If they are available, he/she will meet you in the lobby. If you are dropping an item off, please leave the item with Front Office staff. They will make sure the parties involved are informed and the items are collected.

Family Visiting Days:
Family Visiting Days are a unique opportunity for the Sussex Montessori community to come visit our students in their classrooms and get a better sense of the work they do daily. Students set up their workstations and present academic content areas such as math, language, cultural, and practical life to visitors. It is a great opportunity for our students to practice their grace and courtesy, public speaking, and proficiency with Montessori materials. Family members have the opportunity to ask questions and engage with the materials themselves! Family Visiting Days are listed on the school calendar, and as the date approaches, classroom teachers will share more information in their weekly emails.

ParentCamp

ParentCamp offers a unique and exciting opportunity for families, community members, and school partners to come together, face to face, and connect through meaningful dialogue and social interaction. Participants share strategies and ideas in a safe space to benefit student learning, teaching, and parenting!

Arrival and Dismissal

Arrival
Sussex Montessori School (SMS) classrooms open for students at 7:45 am. Welcoming our students on-time and adhering carefully to school rules and routines will help ensure a safe and welcoming start to every day.

For the safety of all our children, please ***DO NOT use cell phones*** during arrival or dismissal.

Carline Drop Off
Carline drop-off begins no earlier than 7:45 a.m. Please pull in the front of the designated "Car Drop-Off Area". A staff member will be there to greet your child. Please do not leave until there is an adult present at your drop-off location. Do not get out of your car in the drop off area. **If you need to get out of the car to come into the building, please park in the front parking lot and walk together with your child.**

Any students not in the building by 8:00 a.m. will need to be escorted into the office by an adult and signed in. Children arriving **AFTER** 8:15 am will be recorded as tardy.

Bus Drop Off
Students will be dropped off in the designated bus zone on campus. Starting at 7:45 am, students will exit their buses and walk to their classrooms or to get their breakfast from the Carriage House.

Dismissal
Carline dismissal begins at 3:00 p.m. Please do not arrive before 2:45 p.m., as this helps our buses to enter into the designated bus departure zone. Buses are loaded and depart between 3:15 and 3:25 p.m.

Having a safe dismissal is of utmost importance to us at SMS. It is necessary that we have open and consistent communication about your child's transportation. If you know that your child is going home a different way than usual, you must submit a written note to the school office, email dismissals@sussexms.k12.de.us or call the Front Office **by noon that day**. Please do not email your child's teacher as they may not have time during the day to check their email messages. Please let us know as soon as possible about any changes to your child's regular dismissal arrangement. We will not allow your child to go home with anyone other than already approved individuals unless we have written confirmation from the parent/guardian (photo ID required). Please note, that students who are not listed on a specific bus roster can not accompany a friend or relative home on the bus.

Bus Riders are dismissed from the classroom to the bus loading zone when their bus is called. Each bus has a staff member assigned as a Bus Captain, who is responsible for checking student names with the daily bus rider attendance list compiled by the Front Office before letting their bus depart.

Car Riders will be waiting with staff members in either Carline A or Carline B. Please do not get out of the car, as this will slow down the line. All children should be able to buckle themselves into their seats. Children will not be allowed to ride home with friends or other family members unless they are on the approval list and/or we have written consent from *both* families.

Emergency Dismissal Changes
If a change occurs during the school day, please call or email the Front Office – dismissals@sussexms.k12.de.us. We ask that all emergency dismissal changes be called in as early as possible, **before noon**. There is a process that needs to happen on our end to ensure your child is safe. We appreciate your cooperation with this.

There is also a web-based dismissal form. To submit changes, please follow these steps:

Step 1: Visit the School's Homepage https://sussexmontessoricharter.com/.

Step 2: Locate the links on the school's homepage. There are two buttons “Report Absences” and “Dismissal Changes.”
Step 3: Click on the link that corresponds to the action you want to take – whether it is reporting an absence or making a dismissal change request.
Step 4: Complete the requested information on the form.
Step 5: Submit the Form.
Step 6: Once your submission is successful, you should receive a confirmation message or email.

Tardiness and Early Dismissal

All students are expected to be at school on time. Classrooms open at 7:45 a.m. Students are expected to be in the classroom by 8:00 a.m. and remain at school until the end of the school day at 3:00 p.m. If a student arrives after 8:00 a.m., they can be considered tardy. For safety reasons and accountability, a parent/guardian must accompany a tardy child into school and sign the child in at the Front Office. Parents/guardians do not need to take students to their classrooms after they have signed in. Late arrivals are closely monitored by the student's teacher and the Head of School (HOS). If a student is consistently late, parents or guardians will be contacted to discuss the student's tardiness. Families should recognize that a written explanation from home does not automatically constitute an excused absence. Reasons such as personal illness, medical appointments, and appearances in court can be considered as excused tardiness when verified with a note. Such reasons as car trouble, personal business, heavy traffic, home obligations, or other unexpected occurrences, while understandable, are not acceptable excuses and will be listed as unexcused.

When a student accumulates any combination of 10 unexcused late arrivals and/or unexcused early dismissals, a meeting with the Head of School will be required. Cases of excessive absence or tardiness, not resolved after a meeting with the HOS, may be referred to the Board of Directors for further action.

Attendance

Every student is expected to attend school every day. Forming responsible habits regarding attendance and promptness is important. Learning time is lost when a student misses any portion of the academic day. Parents/guardians are expected to support the goal of punctuality by having their children arrive on time, remain in school for a full day, and schedule appointments after school hours whenever possible. Sussex Montessori requires that students attend school in accordance with Delaware State Laws.

For more information, please see the Attendance Policy (Appendix A) for details concerning excused and unexcused absences.

Enrollment/Re-enrollment procedures

Enrollment

The SMS application window for each school year is from the first Monday in November through the second Wednesday in January. All materials must be received by this date, accurate and in full, to be considered. Applications may be submitted online at www.schoolchoicede.org.

Application materials may be completed online, sent via email (scanned with hand-written signatures), standard post, or hand-delivered to the school. If materials sent via standard post are postmarked by the deadline, they will be accepted.

Important Enrollment Dates –2027-2028	
Online Choice Application Opens	November 2, 2026
Online Choice Application Closes	January 13, 2027
Lottery for Sussex Montessori	January 26, 2027 (tentative)
Parent/guardian Notification	February 26, 2027
Parent/guardian Notify District/School	March 19, 2027

Re-enrollment

Current enrolled families do not need to complete an online application each year. An intent to re-enroll form will be sent home to help us plan for the next school year's enrollment.

Transportation

SMS contracts bus service for its students. The bus ride is an extension of the school day and behavior consistent with Montessori Grace and Courtesy is expected. The principles, procedures and policies included in the Family Handbook remain in effect anytime a student is on a school bus (including the ride to and from school, field trips, and any other bus related travels). Riding the school bus is a privilege for each student. If the following rules and regulations are not followed, the student may no longer be given the opportunity to ride the bus. If the privilege to ride the bus is suspended or revoked, the parent(s) / guardian(s) will be responsible for transporting their child to and from school. While riding the bus, students are to adhere to the following rules:

- The bus driver is in charge of the bus and students are expected to follow all instructions given by the driver.
- Students must remain properly seated at all times (back-to-back; bottom to bottom), keep voice volume low, and keep hands and arms inside the windows.
- Students are to keep their hands and feet to themselves (no horseplay, fighting, etc.).
- Students may engage in ordinary conversations in a normal tone; however, the driver has the authority to prohibit any conversation.
- Students are to conduct themselves on the bus in such a way that will not distract the driver. (Distracting the driver puts everyone on the bus at risk. Students who do not follow the reasonable requests of the bus driver jeopardize their riding privileges.)

- Students are not to eat or drink while on the bus.
- Students are not to throw objects of any kind inside, outside or around the bus.
- Students should keep the bus clean, sanitary, and orderly. They must not damage or abuse bus seats or equipment.
- Students are not to use abusive language or profanity, obscene or rude gestures or spit while on the bus.
- Students are not to leave the bus without the driver's permission, except on arrival at their assigned bus stop or at school.
- Students and parent/guardian/guardians will be required to sign a bus etiquette form.
- SMS prohibits the use of cell phones by students during school hours and this policy extends to bus travel as well. Any unauthorized use of cell phones or other electronics will be handled under bus discipline policies as well as the guidelines outlined under the Electronic Communications section below.

Minor bus misbehaviors will result in a warning and parent/guardian contact. Subsequent minor bus misbehaviors may result in suspension of bus riding privileges for a period of time, as determined by the administration and the bus company. Continual offenses for bus infractions may result in permanent revocation of bus riding privileges. Any major disruptive behavior such as fighting, vandalism, etc. will result in immediate suspension of riding privileges for a period of time as determined by the School Leadership Team, and may result in permanent revocation of riding privileges and other consequences. Families may be asked to compensate for any damage(s) incurred.

Weather

Sussex Montessori School will communicate weather-related delays, closures, or schedule changes with families through **Infinite Campus**, using the contact information on file. Notifications may be sent by **phone, text message, and email**. Families are encouraged to keep their contact information current in Infinite Campus and ensure that voicemail boxes can receive messages.
Additionally, WBOC, SMS's website and Facebook page will list SMS delay/closing plans for the day.

Birthdays and Holidays

Birthdays are a very special event in a child's life. Often, however, the true meaning gets lost in the festivities and presents. As a Montessori School, we celebrate a child's birthday in a unique and meaningful way centered on the child's time on the planet. While each classroom has its own unique celebrations, the centerpiece of a Montessori birthday celebration is the Birthday Walk.

A Montessori Birthday Walk is a special classroom tradition that helps children understand the passage of time and celebrate their growth in a meaningful way. Unlike a traditional birthday party, the Birthday Walk connects a child's birthday to the Earth's journey around the Sun.

Before the celebration, families are invited to provide a baby photo and several photos showing the child at different ages. During the Birthday Walk, a candle or model of the Sun is placed in the center of a circle, and the child slowly walks around it once for each year of their life, representing one trip the Earth makes around the Sun each year. As the child completes each lap, the student or a family member shares a few highlights from that year of the child's life, using the photos to illustrate their growth and development.

This simple, respectful tradition honors each child's unique journey while reinforcing concepts of time, astronomy, and personal growth in a way that is meaningful and memorable. If you would like to contribute a small birthday snack, please check with your child's teacher first. All snacks need to be checked in advance to ensure they meet the school and classroom guidelines. Healthy snacks are always encouraged!

If you are hosting a celebration outside the class and inviting some families from school, please be mindful of the impact of such celebrations on class life. Please do not send birthday invitations to school. Rather send the invitations through the regular mail or other means, out of sensitivity to children not included in the celebration.

Holidays in a Montessori classroom provide opportunities for the study of history, culture, and geography. As a Montessori community, we encourage the understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures. If your family has a special holiday that you would like to share with your child's classmates, please check with your child's teacher first to confirm the specifics.

Field Trips

SMS believes in creating many opportunities for children outside of the classroom. Throughout the school year, children will be given opportunities inside and outside of the school to enhance their learning. Some of these may have an associated fee. We will work with families to ensure that all children have access to field trips and special programs. **Students who have received more than two out-of-school suspensions during the school year may not be allowed to attend a field trip.** This requirement is intended to support the safety and successful participation of other classmates and staff.

Permission slips must be turned in by the due date on the permission slip. Children are required to travel with the class to and from the field trip unless special arrangements have been made and approved by the Head of School.

Food Services

Lunches brought from home should be nutritious and well-balanced. **Students may not bring candy, soda, or caffeinated beverages to school.** Lunches should be ready to eat. They will be stored in student cubbies. School meals are brought in from a nearby School Food Authority. We ensure that all meals are not only appealing to children, but also meet the national guidelines.

Sussex Montessori School participates in the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs called the Community Eligibility Provision.

The Community Eligibility Provision was enacted as a result of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act 2010 and provides universal meal service to students in schools/districts that qualify. The Community Eligibility Provision is an alternative to collecting, approving, and verifying household eligibility applications for free and reduced-price meal benefits.

All students enrolled at Sussex Montessori can receive a nutritious breakfast and lunch at school at **no charge** to your household. No further action is required of you. Your child(ren) will be able to receive breakfast and/or lunch without having to pay a fee or submit a meal benefit form.

Families have the option to have students purchase ice cream and other snacks during lunch time. Students can bring in money for their account at the beginning of the day, or families can set up an online account though Infinite Campus . To create an account Connect, please follow these steps:

For Questions or Assistance, please contact Anita R. Mitchell at 302-404-5367 ext.215 or email anita.mitchell@sussexms.k12.de.us.

Homework

Our goal in Montessori is to inspire in children a sense of wonder and purpose – and joyful learning in their lives. We encourage our students to pursue things that interest them: researching and seeking information to build knowledge of that which inspires them most.

At SMS, we believe that young children learn best through meaningful, hands-on experiences during the school day. Because our classrooms provide uninterrupted work periods designed to meet each child's individual learning needs, formal homework is not assigned.

After school, we encourage children to enjoy family time, outdoor play, reading together, helping with everyday household tasks, and getting plenty of rest. These real-life experiences support independence, language development, problem-solving, and a lifelong love of learning.

In addition, reading every day is essential, and reading at home should have a routine, setting aside an established time for children to read with family members through read-alouds, shared reading, and discussions about what is being read.

While formal homework is not assigned, there are times when a teacher may assign work to be completed or reviewed at home. Teachers may assign work to be completed at home on a case-by-case basis for a variety of reasons, such as:

- Additional practice to build skills, such as math tables or spelling work

- There is a home – school connection
- Special projects or events that require more time and support
- The student hasn't finished work on a consistent basis during the school day

Finally, if a child is absent for an extended period, the teacher may provide suggestions for activities or resources to help maintain continuity of learning. Otherwise, we encourage families to focus on creating a balanced home life that nurtures curiosity, responsibility, and joyful exploration.

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Title I

Sussex Montessori School qualifies to receive federal funding through the Title 1 program. "Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the "Every Student Succeeds Act" (ESEA) provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards." (US Department of Education, 2018)

Title I schools are identified as:

- Schools with 40% or more low-income students, or
- Schools with an equal to or higher low-income percentage than the total district or charter.
- Charter schools (with any low-income percentage) and district schools (with a low-income percentage of at least 35%) can also be identified as Title I schools with an approved schoolwide waiver.

After being identified as a Title I school by population, the district or charter must agree to provide Title I funding directly to the school. The Title 1 Annual Meeting will take place in September.

The updated Schoolwide Plan and Family Engagement Policy is available on the Title 1 Resource page of our website at Title 1 Resources - Sussex Montessori School (sussexmontessoricharter.com).

Title IX

Title IX of the federal **Education Amendments Of 1972** is the major federal statute prohibiting sex discrimination in education. Title IX is primarily known for its impact on gender equality in sports, but it also extends to other areas of education.

Title IX states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance."

Under Title IX, schools are required to provide equal opportunities and treatment for both male and female students. This includes, but is not limited to, admissions, academic programs, counseling, financial aid, student housing, and athletics. Schools must ensure that there is no discrimination based on sex in any of these areas.

For more information on Title IX please go to Delaware Department of Education website at Title IX – Delaware Department of Education.

Personal Property

The Montessori classroom is an enriched "prepared environment" of specifically designed materials that lead children toward abstraction of the concepts being studied. We discourage children from bringing articles to school that may distract them from their learning experience. **Toys, electronic devices, trading cards, fidget spinners, and cell phones (see cell phone policy below) are not permitted. Sussex Montessori is not responsible for the loss of these personal items.**

Teachers may offer opportunities to bring in personal items for special events or projects. If this is the case, they will inform families about expectations and usage of the items during the school day. We welcome books or other supplemental materials which have been discussed with the teacher and are related to the work of the classroom.

Communication Devices

With the technology available on many cellular phones today, students can be tempted to visit non-academic sites on the internet, use non-school related apps and/or communicate unnecessarily via text messaging, etc. Therefore, we feel that cell phone use can often be a negative influence on school culture and can distract students from their academic and community responsibilities. **As such, SMS prohibits the use of cell phones by students at school, unless specifically approved by a teacher for a specific project or assignment.**

Cell Phone Policy

There will be no unauthorized use of cell phones for any purpose during school hours. Cell phones must be turned off during school hours. Cell phones must remain in student backpacks or other designated areas during the school day, including during recess and field trips. Classroom teachers may collect and hold all cell phones throughout the day in a secure phone locker. If a student chooses not to follow the conditions outlined above, his/her phone will be confiscated by a SMS staff member. A parent or legal guardian will be required to speak in person with school staff for the phone to be returned to the student. Any student who must call home may use a school phone with permission from faculty/staff. In addition, any family member who needs to contact a student needs to call the Front Office. We ask that you speak directly with your child to be certain that he/she understands this policy and how any violation will affect him/her and his/her parent/guardian.

Dress Code

Children need comfortable and appropriate clothing to participate fully in all classroom and outdoor activities. Personal appearance, dress or grooming must not disrupt the educational process or threaten the health or safety of any individual. Attire worn to school should be respectful of others and free from profanity and/or offensive images. All upper body wear must cover the entire abdomen. Shorts, skirts, and dresses should be knee length.

If a student arrives at school dressed in clothing that does not meet these expectations, a staff member will first work with the student to identify an appropriate alternative clothing item, when one is available at school. If an appropriate alternative is not available, the student's parent/guardian will be contacted and asked to bring appropriate clothing for the student. Staff will address these situations respectfully and discreetly, with the goal of allowing the student to return to regular school activities as quickly as possible. In either case, the parent / guardian will be notified.

Children should have both a pair of **"indoor shoes"** and **"outdoor shoes"**. **"Indoor shoes"** are worn in the classroom and allow students to be comfortable and safe. Indoor shoes help keep the classroom clean, and are needed in case of an emergency, such as a fire drill, and a student needs to quickly leave the classroom. Crocs, slip-on sneakers, and slippers with hard soles make good indoor shoes. Students wear their **"outdoor shoes"** for any activities outside the classroom, such as recess or physical education. Outdoor shoes must be closed-toed and have a back and should be sturdy enough for outdoor play.

Lost and Found

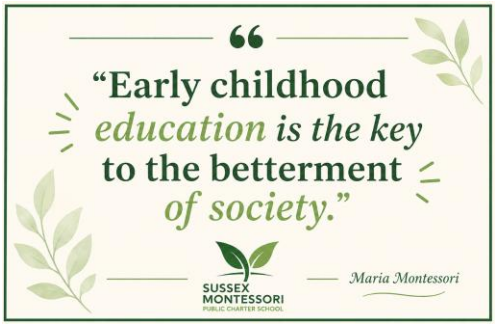
Please put nametags or labels on student clothing, supplies (lunchboxes, backpacks, water bottles, etc.) and other easily misplaced items. Lost items are regularly collected from key areas (such as the playground) and returned if labeled. Collected items without a label are kept in the school's lost and found. Any family can ask permission at the Front Office to look through the school's lost and found item's collection. Typically, all lost and found items are displayed during school conferences and other school events; families are encouraged to look through them to identify items belonging to their child(ren). Unclaimed items will be donated to a local charity at the end of the school year. Teachers and other staff are not responsible for students' items.

Health and Medical Information

Illness

- In the event your child becomes ill while at school, the school nurse will contact the family/guardian to arrange for pickup.
- A child with a fever over 100 degrees Fahrenheit will be sent home.
- Children must be fever-free for 24 hours, *without* using fever reducing medications such as Tylenol or Motrin, before they may return to school.
- Children who vomit at school must also be picked up and taken home. Children must go 24 hours without vomiting before returning to school.
- If sent home by the school nurse, a note is not needed for your child to return to school unless they remain home for more than one subsequent school day.
- If you keep your child home due to illness, a note from the family/guardian or the child's doctor is required for the absence to be excused.
- For COVID-19 SMS will follow CDC and DOE guidance criteria.

Medications



- For a child to receive prescribed medication while at school, the Parent Request / Permission to Have Medication Administered in School form must be filled out and on file in the child's chart. To avoid unnecessary disruption of the child's learning, medications prescribed for twice per day administration will not be given during the school day unless required by a doctor.
- The prescription must be prescribed currently (within a year, preferably within the current school year) by a licensed health care provider.
- The prescription must be provided in the original labeled container by the pharmacy.
- The prescription cannot be expired or out of date.
- The prescription must be counted in the presence of both the parent/guardian and the school nurse at the time it is brought to the school and when returned to the parent/guardian. This is documented on the medication form.
- Over the counter medications require parent/guardian permission, which is given on the health history form required for enrollment.
- Prescribed medication must be brought in by parent or guardian. Children cannot carry medication to school.
- Children may not carry, store, or take prescription or over-the-counter medications anywhere on campus, including lunchboxes, backpacks, or personal belongings.
- All student medications—including medications such as Tylenol—must be brought to and administered through the Nurse's Office in accordance with school medication procedures.

Food Allergies

- Please call and speak to the school nurse if your child has any food allergies.
- For substitutions to be made for the child's school prepared meals, the Prevention & Emergency Response Plan for Students with Allergies Form must be completed by a licensed healthcare provider. This form is available online and via the school website for download.
- In the event a child suffers from a life threating allergy (e.g., peanuts) a Notification of Child Food Allergy letter will be distributed to the child's class. An EpiPen is to be provided by the family/guardian.

Student Support

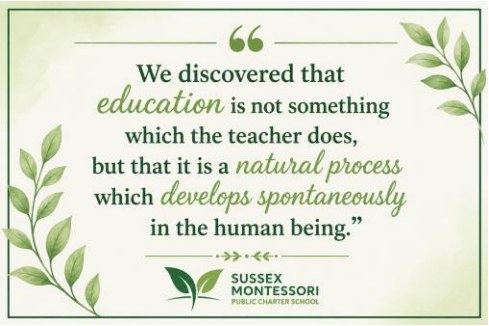
Homelessness

Sussex Montessori School's Homeless Liaison is responsible for guaranteeing students experiencing homelessness receive a free, appropriate public education. The family/guardian must be informed of educational and related opportunities available for their child. Students are to remain in the school they have been attending whenever possible, although they may not meet residency requirements. The Liaison must ensure that proper enrollment occurs, contacting the previous school to assist in the determination of placement, obtaining the necessary documents, such as immunizations, and arranging transportation. The Liaison shall support the child's full participation in school activities including clubs, sports, homework help, etc. The role of the Liaison is to:

1) Assist with student enrollment and obtainment of needed documentation
2) Support families and students identified under McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.
3) Provide related educational materials and resources for staff including teaching staff, registrars, secretaries, counselors, nurses, bus drivers, food service workers, facilities staff, administrators, and tutors
4) Enter information in the Department of Education database
5) Ensure that posters and outreach material are displayed in common areas of the building(s)
6) Obtain resources for students through grants, local partners, community, and neighboring schools
7) Collaborate with community agencies, law enforcement, legal aid, housing agencies, mental health agencies, libraries, youth services, motels, campgrounds, and health centers to provide outreach and resources
8) Attend professional development to support their knowledge and understanding

Please contact the Homeless Liaison for more information. Delaware's commitment and policies on education for students experiencing homelessness can be found at Education for Students Experiencing Homelessness – Delaware Department of Education.

Student Support Teams and Special Education



Sussex Montessori School (SMS) believes that students with disabilities should be served in regular classrooms whenever possible. Special education is viewed as an integral part of the general education program offered to all students.

The objective of the special education program is to provide the most appropriate educational program

for each student in the least restrictive environment, consistent with the school's obligation to provide an appropriate learning environment for all students.

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed to meet the individualized needs of each student with special needs. The educational services are provided at no cost to the family. The IEP will be updated yearly, and all teachers will monitor and note progress towards the objectives written into each IEP in accordance with federal law.

Please see Delaware Procedural Safeguards: Parent/guardian and Child Rights in Education, located on the policy resources page of the school's website, learn more about the support and opportunities offered on the Special Populations page of our website, or contact the Special Education Coordinator for more information.

Multiple Language Learners

The Supreme Court of the United States determined that in order for public schools to comply with their legal obligations under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI), they must take affirmative steps to ensure that students with limited English proficiency (LEP) can meaningfully participate in their educational programs and services.

SMS is committed to meeting the unique needs of all enrolled Multiple Language Learners. In compliance with the above-named laws, SMS will implement the standardized entrance procedures set forth in Delaware's Every Student Succeeds Act plan and will adhere to the procedures and policies outlined in our Multiple Language Learners policy. **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**

Please contact the Multiple Language Learners Coordinator for more information.

Communication

Board of Directors

Sussex Montessori School is governed by a Board of Directors in accordance with Delaware Department of Education regulations. The Board of Directors holds monthly public meetings on the third Tuesday of the month. Agendas are posted on the agendas and minutes page of the school's website seven days prior to each board meeting. Meeting minutes are posted on the school's website within 48 hours of the board meeting where they are approved. More information on board members can also be found on the school website - (https://sussexmontessoricharter.com/board-of-directors).

Citizens' Budget Oversight Committee
SMS also has a Citizen's Budget Oversight Committee (CBOC), educators in the school, board members, and a representative of the Department of Education. More information on CBOC can be found on the school website.

Questions, Comments, and Concerns

Please know that your questions, comments, and concerns are important to Sussex Montessori School staff, Head of School, and Board of Directors.

- If you have information pertaining to your child's development or progress, please leave a message with the Front Office and your child's teacher will contact you within 48 hours.
- If the matter does not pertain to your child's development or progress, please contact the Front Office who will ensure you are placed in contact with the Head of School or the appropriate school personnel.

Student Conference Days and Report Cards

Sussex Montessori School believes that a partnership with families includes clear and ongoing communication. We believe that at Sussex Montessori School families should have a clear understanding of their child's academic and social/emotional well-being, as well as a deep understanding of general classroom curriculum and procedures. Your child's teacher will share their communication plan with you early in the school year which will include:

Scheduled Conference Days
There are three scheduled parent conferences scheduled throughout the year (Please see the school Calendar for exact dates.)

1) **The Fall conference** is set aside for goal setting. Teachers share what they have observed and learned about their students and collaborate with their parents/guardians on establishing goals for their student for the year.
2) **The Spring conference** provides the opportunity to check in on the student's progress.
3) **The end-of-the-year** conference is Portfolio Day. Throughout the year, every student self-selects examples of their work for their Portfolio. The selected works showcases the student's growth and progress throughout the year and allows them to share what they have learned through reflection and discussion. The portfolio grows with the students as they advance through the school, providing them with insight and documentation of their learning path at SMS.

Progress Reports and Transparent Classroom

Reports are shared through Transparent Classroom, an online Montessori communication tool. At the beginning of the year, Teachers will make sure that every family has been invited to be part of their Transparent Classroom directory. Throughout the year, teachers will use Transparent Classroom to share information and pictures about student's work in their classroom.

Families will receive three progress reports throughout the year. Progress Reports are shared before the Fall and Winter conferences, and after the end of the school year. Progress Reports share teacher's insight into their student's in all subjects as well as characteristics defining an engaged learner and citizenship within the class and school-wide community.

School Website

The school website (www.sussexmontessoricharter.com) is an important resource, particularly as it relates to key dates and events, forms, enrollment, and health related concerns or updates. Please visit our website regularly to stay abreast of all of Sussex Montessori School's happenings!

Appendices

I. **Appendix A: Attendance Policy**

II. **Appendix C: Discipline and Bullying Policy**

III. **Appendix D: Crisis Assessment**

IV. **Appendix E: Wellness Policy**

V. **Appendix F: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)**

VI. **Appendix G: Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)**

VII. **Appendix H: McKinney-Vento Procedures**

VIII. **Appendix I: Title 1 Rights and Procedures**

Family Handbook Acknowledgement Form

SUSSEX MONTESSORI
PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

I,

_____

Parent/guardian/guardian or Guardian of

_____

Student's Name(s)

have received, read, and understand all the information presented in the SY 2026 - 27 Sussex Montessori School Family Handbook.

_____ _____

Signature **Date**

Once completed, please return this form to the Front Office.

SCHOOL PARENT COMPACT

As a student I promise to…

_____ Follow the School Wide Principles
_____ Show Respect to all individuals
_____ Act Responsibly, Do My Best
_____ Ask questions to get help
_____ Keep a home reading contract
_____ Come to school prepared each day with all necessary supplies
_____ Respect and cooperate with my teacher, Follow Directions
_____ Participate in lessons
_____ Do my class work
_____ Do my homework
_____ Complete class projects

_____ Date:_____
Signature of student

As a parent I promise to…

_____ Attend and participate in Conferences
_____ Monitor health/wellness of my child
_____ Support the teachers
_____ Make a time and place for home study
_____ Communicate with the teacher
_____ Encourage/Submit quality work on-time
_____ Control TV-Video time
_____ Encourage Outdoor Play/Learning
_____ Participate in Family Learning activities whenever possible
_____ Make sure my child attends daily and is prepared for school

_____ Date: _____
Signature of parent/guardian

As a teacher I promise to….

_____ Report student progress frequently
_____ Provide high quality lessons and materials in a supportive and effective learning environment
_____ Respect my students and families
_____ Provide activities and materials to support parent involvement
_____ Communicate with parents
_____ Notify parents of any change in behavior or academics
_____ Be available to parents
_____ Participate in Family Learning activities whenever possible
_____ Hold conferences where student work, achievement, behavior, and social development are discussed at least annually

_____ Date: _____
Signature of teacher

As a school, we promise to….

_____ Provide parents reasonable access to staff to discuss issues
_____ Provide opportunities to become involved with the school and school decision-making
_____ Share the Safety Plan with families
_____ Provide a range of acceptable times when classes can be visited by parents
_____ Provide a safe learning environment for all students
_____ Coordinate access to resources to meet students' needs

_____ Date: _____
Signature of Principal