



THE Montessori School
of Englewood | A Chicago Public
Charter School

Middle School Student and Family Handbook 2021-2022

“The adolescent must never be treated as a child,
for that is a stage of life that has passed.”

—Maria Montessori

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Montessori School of Englewood thanks Francis W. Parker Charter Essential Schools/Theodore R. Sizer Teachers Center and Lakeland Montessori Middle School for sharing the contents of their middle school handbooks. Those documents greatly informed the creation of this handbook.

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CERTIFICATE OF RECEIPT AND UNDERSTANDING

My child and I have reviewed the 2021–2022 *Montessori School of Englewood Handbook for Middle School Students and Families*. We understand our responsibilities to and expectations of MSE and agree to be guided by them.

Student's Name (please print)

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

After reading this Handbook, please print out this page and fill in your child's name, sign, date, and return to MSE staff. Thank you!

WELCOME!

Welcome to the Montessori School of Englewood (MSE) Middle School! Whether your family is new to MSE or been with us since we opened in 2012, we are eager to share this wonderful experience with you.

MSE MISSION AND VISION

The mission of the Montessori School of Englewood is to create a learning community where members trust one another to use our heads, hearts, and hands to commit to a life of growth and fulfillment.

Our vision is to inspire students' academic success through an authentic Montessori and culturally relevant education. We do this by nurturing middle school students' curiosity, creativity, and personal agency and by encouraging their self-directed learning.

MIDDLE SCHOOL FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION

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WHO WAS MARIA MONTESSORI?

Maria Montessori (1870 – 1952) was an Italian pediatrician, mathematician, teacher, and ultimately an educational philosopher. She was a peace advocate during World War II, which won her two nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize. By the time of her death, close to 900 Montessori schools were operating in the United States, all of which were private. Today, there are more than 7,000 Montessori schools, with public schools, like The Montessori School of Englewood, being the fastest growing sector.

Maria Montessori specialized in pediatrics and psychology, which led her to work with students with developmental differences. She began to develop her method of observing students within the learning process and noting the inner drive that occurred when the adult (teacher) steps back. She began to offer choice in both activity and in scheduling to see how this level of independence would affect her young subjects. She noticed that her students seemed to embrace a calmness and intensity of focus that she had not seen in them previously. Soon she focused on the power of hands-on activities. Montessori began to measure her students' progress and noting its significance. She embarked on a tour of speeches on child development and learning theories. Over the years, her educational philosophy took root.

Montessori became the director of the school **Casa dei Bambini**, which in Italian means **Children's House**. She had 60 students ranging from 1 to 6 years. The school was located in a high-poverty section of Rome, where many children lacked good nutrition and social preparedness. These students became her case study. She applied all the theory she had already learned and continued to observe and alter the students' learning practice. It was at the Casa dei Bambini that Montessori created what we now know as the *prepared environment*. She understood that if the learning environment was well prepared each morning and each work or lesson was ready, then her students were able to start where they left off the previous day, building a sense of independence. Each activity included a lesson and often self-directed and self-correcting follow-up work, which allowed students to work independently. Today, this practice is not revolutionary, but rather is understood as a best practice. Much of what we see in K—8 schooling today is based on Maria Montessori's philosophy, developed more 100 years ago.

Maria Montessori is often regarded as one of the most influential women in history. Her practice is stronger now that it was during her lifetime.

WHAT IS A MONTESSORI EDUCATION?

The Montessori Method is based on the idea that young people are natural learners, and therefore capable of fulfilling their human potential through self-directed efforts.

The Montessori Method is based on three core principles:

1. Teaching begins with and builds on students' curiosity and interests through hands-on experiences.
2. Education is about the whole child, which means the school gives equal attention to developing students' emotions and characters as well as their intellects.
3. A nurturing, supportive classroom and school community is essential for learning.

In the Montessori approach, the role of the teacher is profoundly different than in most school classrooms, where the teacher is the authority and passes knowledge onto students. But a Montessori teacher's main job is to *eliminate barriers* to students' process of growth. The Montessori teacher relies on students to communicate what they need academically, socially, and emotionally. Montessori teachers carefully observe and follow each student and help guide ongoing learning. As Maria Montessori observed and taught, **young people care very much about their own learning.**

At MSE, we believe that Montessori is the best way to teach in public schools. The Montessori Method nurtures in students from a very early age essential learning qualities such as curiosity, enthusiasm, cooperation, respect for difference, stick-to-it-iveness, and reflection—the basic building blocks for lifelong learning.

Today, "21st century learning and innovation skills" are defined as *creativity, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration*. Complementing these goals are "Life and Career Skills," which are *flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, leadership and responsibility*. The State of Illinois now includes Social/Emotional Learning (SEL) standards, including *self-awareness and self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and social responsibility*. **Montessori education cultivates each of these "modern" attributes in children from their very first day in the classroom.**

Montessori instruction is also highly academic. The list of visionary and accomplished individuals who are a product of Montessori education is long, ranging from artists and writers like Yo Yo Ma, Helen Keller, Anne Frank, and Julia Child, to business innovators Jeff Bezos (founder of Amazon) and Sergey Brin and Larry Page (founders of Google).

1. The MSE Middle School develops students' habits of mind and the heart.

A Montessori education focuses on developing students' habits of the mind and the heart. **Habits of mind** empower individuals to fearlessly address academic and creative problems. When cultivated and developed, they make learning self-regulated and self-motivated. Habits of mind are not thinking skills that can be easily measured; rather they are **dispositions** that individuals draw upon when approaching an intellectual task. **Habits of the heart are an array of emotional attributes** that enable individuals to care for and identify with others, and honor how others see the world. Habits of heart are connected to how students manage their own emotions and respect those of other individuals and groups. At the same time, we want **learning to be joyful**. The MSE middle school is designed so that students are immersed in work that is rich and satisfying—that cultivates and expands students' minds and hearts.

2. The MSE Middle School emphasizes depth over coverage.

MSE Middle School emphasizes in-depth research and project-based learning, which will enable each student to master a number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas reflect the traditional academic disciplines, we offer a course of study that is driven by the imaginative powers, competencies, and needs of students. Curricular decisions are guided by the MSE goal of **student mastery and achievement**, rather than by an effort to “cover” content. This principle is fundamental to Montessori theory and practice. Teaching and learning is documented and assessed with tools based on student performance of real tasks. Students not on track toward meeting their goals are provided intensive support and given the resources to assist them to quickly meet performance tasks. Multiple forms of evidence, ranging from ongoing observation of the student to completion of specific projects are used to better understand each student's strengths and needs, and to plan for further assistance. Students have opportunities to exhibit their expertise before family and community. Before entering high school, students demonstrate mastery through portfolio presentation and/or a capstone project.

3. The MSE Middle School sets high expectations and goals for all students.

MSE maintains high expectations for everyone in the classroom, while acknowledging that achievement goals may differ among students. MSE teachers personalize instruction to meet all students where they are; they challenge and support students in developing knowledge, skills, intellectual dispositions, and self-sufficiency—regardless of where a student is in relation to the meeting of grade-level standards.

4. The MSE Middle School is committed to the community.

MSE views families as key collaborators and vital members of the school community. Our middle school teachers create curriculum that builds on the strengths of the surrounding neighborhood and maximizes opportunities for service learning. The Middle School is designed to empower students to explore the City of Chicago and other regions through regular field study and excursions.

5. The MSE Middle School emphasizes affirmation, trust, respect, generosity, and social justice.

A Montessori education promotes values of affirmative expectation, trust, fairness, civility and generosity, and tolerance. MSE therefore makes the classroom a model of democratic and inclusive

practices. Students have a voice in their schooling, and participate in building classroom community. Curricular decisions are responsive to students' culture and values and build on their diverse prior learning experiences. Teachers acknowledge and demonstrate that they honor what students bring to the classroom and their diversity in personality, background, and interests. MSE purposefully and explicitly challenges all forms of discrimination and inequity. **Our aim is to educate our students to be advocates for and agents of change.**

OVERVIEW OF MSE'S MIDDLE SCHOOL PROGRAM

The MSE Middle School courses of study combines Montessori philosophy with Illinois Learning Standards (Mathematics, Social Studies, and English/Language Arts); Illinois Social-Emotional Learning Standards; Next Generation Science Standards (adopted by the State of Illinois); 21st Century Learning Standards; as well as research on developmental needs of adolescents and best practices in creating culturally responsive curricula.

Students at MSE Middle School receive instruction in the following subjects:

- Advisory/Community Meeting, including Executive Functioning
- Mathematics
- Language Arts
- Science and the Natural World
- Social Studies and Civics
- African American Studies
- Research
- Urban Farming and Nutrition
- Electives in art, drama, music, dance, and sports
- Academic excursions and field trips

Advisory/Community Meeting; Executive Functioning

Advisory is held daily. Students are assigned daily roles and take turns facilitating the meeting. Active daily participation is required. **Community meeting** is where community standards are discussed and addressed, where lessons are given, and where concerns and praise for one another is shared. Lessons in **executive functioning** involve developing emotional intelligence, study skills and critically analyzing important themes through writing. Students are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings while learning to construct coherent arguments, rooted in fact.

Mathematics

Students receive math instruction daily using an integrated curriculum that incorporates Montessori materials to introduce concepts concretely before students practice them abstractly.

Language Arts

MSE's language arts curriculum encompasses an integrated study of vocabulary, literature, grammar and mechanics, and writing. The curriculum teaches students to value reading and writing well, to self-initiate reading and writing in their own lives, and to see reading and writing as tools to change themselves and the world around them. Students read and write in a wide range of genres for a variety of authentic purposes and learn to communicate with a variety of audiences. Vocabulary is presented across the curriculum and is assessed regularly. Grammar is studied within the context of literature and writing. With special emphasis on critical analysis, students practice daily a variety of types of writing in response to literature and informational texts.

Science and the Natural World

In sixth, seventh and eighth grade, science instruction includes elements of life science, physical science and earth science. Following the Next Generation Science Standards, the goal of MSE's science program is to give students the opportunity to become proficient critical thinkers while mastering the core understandings in that focus area.

Social Studies and Civics

The goal of the social world curriculum is to provide students with a holistic understanding of the world and their place in it. Students use primary and secondary sources from a variety of opposing viewpoints, experiential activities, interpretive discussions, and current technology to investigate the past and connect history to current events. Students read a variety of nonfiction texts including biographies, timelines, graphs, maps, and charts. Students study for and take the US Constitution Test and the Illinois State Constitution Test. Passing these tests are requirements for middle school graduation.

African American Studies

The African/African American Studies course is designed to introduce students to a comprehensive overview of the stories of Africans and the African American diaspora from the perspective of their lived experiences. The purpose of the class is to dispel the gross misinterpretations and distortions of the African continent and its inhabitants, as well as those of the African Diaspora.

Research

Students complete several long-term independent research assignments over the course of their time in MSE's Middle School. Research skills are taught across the curriculum.

Health and Wellness Education

Students participate in structured **physical education** program following the Presidential Youth Fitness Program. The curriculum offers students the chance to enhance their motor, cognitive, and interpersonal skills along with an individualized assessment of fitness aptitude. The attainment of these skills and abilities will enable the students to become lifelong learners and lead healthy, active lives.

Sexual health is addressed in the school's Health and Wellness curriculum. Students whose parent/guardian provides a timely written note to the principal objecting to their child's participation in reproductive health education lessons will not be required to do so. The student will not be penalized by this exemption.

Urban Farming and Nutrition

Maria Montessori wrote:

[People] with hands and no head, and [those] with head and no hands are equally out of place in the modern community . . . Therefore, the work on the land is an introduction both to nature and civilization and gives a limitless field for scientific and historic studies . . . The rural atmosphere offers students a kind of "place apart"—a safe and healthy environment to promote their transition to adulthood.

Maria Montessori believed that economic independence was as important to the development of the adolescent as personal independence for the 3-year old, such as learning how to dress and feed oneself. Through MSE's urban gardening program, middle school students

- Learn advanced science topics (astronomy, botany, ecology, and human nutrition) and apply geometry and math knowledge by experimenting, observing, recording data, and drawing conclusions;
- Strengthen collaborative skills, social behaviors, and social-emotional learning through group projects;
- Gain respect for nature—a fundamental Montessori goal;
- Cook and eat the healthful fruits and vegetables they cultivate;
- Share homegrown produce with their families and neighbors, thereby promoting healthful eating habits across the community; and
- Practice business skills through an MSE Farm Stand: greeting and engaging customers, handling payments, rudimentary accounting.

The Montessori structure of multi age groupings allows for many educative and social-emotional learning opportunities through school gardening. Older children mentor younger peers in digging and planting. They team up in tracking growth cycles through data collection and illustration. And all contribute to the nurturing, harvesting, and cooking that lead to lifelong habits of healthy eating.

EXPECTATIONS FOR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Conferences and Report Card Pickup

Parents must attend the two report card pickup days each academic year (fall and spring). See the academic year calendar presented at orientation. At least one of these conferences will be **student-led**. If your student has an IEP, your child's IEP meeting will count as your second commitment to attend a student led conference.

Parent Engagement

Parents are required to attend additional school-based events:

- Parent night at beginning of school year
- Autumn high school planning
- Monthly VAC meetings

The dates for these events will be released at the parent orientation and throughout the school year.

Parents are always welcome to visit MSE classrooms. Please call the office to schedule!

CLASSROOM ASSESSMENTS AND MANDATED TESTS

Mandated Tests

Each year, students enrolled in Chicago Public Schools must take mandated standardized tests. Eighth graders must take and pass the US and Illinois Constitution Tests, as mandated by Illinois law.

High School Enrollment and Selective Enrollment High School Test

Throughout the school year we will be sending out additional information as it becomes available regarding applying for high school, including the selective enrollment process. All students are given an access code to Gocps.com This code allows students to view information on schools for which they qualify and the date that these schools have set aside for visitation. This is also the website which allows students to communicate with CPS about their highschool preferences and through which CPS will indicate acceptance. The Director of Family and Community Engagement will be meeting with all Eighth grade students and parents to assist them in this process.

MSE COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS

Trust, Respect, and Affirmation

As members of the MSE community all students-- as well as teachers, administrators, and the board of directors-- are expected to uphold the ideals of the school, particularly those outlined in Guiding Principle 5 for the Middle School.

Community members must follow all state and federal laws, as well as the specific policies of the school. Above all, community members are expected to observe the spirit of all MSE policies and principles, and principle 8. MSE can only be what we, as a community and as individuals, make it. **Ignorance of a rule or expectation is no excuse.** Aside from any specific punishment, anyone who violates the community expectations is hurting the rest of the community as well as themselves.

When a teacher or MSE staff member asks a student to do something—or to stop doing something—**the student is always expected to obey in a respectful manner.** If the student believes the request is unfair, the student may speak with the Manager of School Culture to deal with the issue later, **after obeying the teacher’s request.**

Consequences

Any member of the community who violates expectations of trust and respect is violating school policy. Issues may be brought to the Principal who will deal with the community member on a case-by-case basis. The Manager of School Culture will confer with MSE leadership to recommend detention, suspension, or expulsion to the principal for a hearing. A teacher also has the right to give a student a detention, but only for lateness or tardiness. Other incidents must be referred to MSE leadership.

Homework Policy

Each teacher will communicate the homework policy for that class. All students are expected to complete their homework on time.

School and Class Attendance

- Students are expected to attend school. (Except as excused by student attendance policy.)
- Late arrivals and early dismissals can add up, counting towards total absences.
- Students are expected to attend their classes. (See class attendance policy.)
- A student who cuts class, or is habitually late, may be require a parent conference.
- Minor lateness penalties are decided by the class and teacher.

School Cleanliness

Community members are expected to help keep the spaces they use tidy and clean. All community members are expected to pick up trash, leave the bathrooms neat, etc.

Appearance and Attire

MSE’s dress code is gender-neutral. MSE does not mandate uniforms, but relies on students and their families to exercise their judgment about what is appropriate attire for the school setting. Under no circumstance may a student’s dress disrupt the educational process. For example, students may not

wear clothing or accessories that display a gang affiliation. Students failing to follow MSE's dress code may be given detentions or excluded from extracurricular activities. They will not be barred from attending class.

Vandalism

Students who vandalize school property or the property of another person is subject to consequences. Parents will be called, and families may be required to clean, repair, or pay for damaged object(s). Severe vandalism may result in suspension.

Theft

Theft violates a basic trust. Students who are found to take school property or the property of another person will be brought to MSE leadership and be subject to consequences.

Unsupervised Spaces

Areas such as the gym, stage, kitchen, and garden, playground, parking lot, are off limits to students at all times, unless are supervised by a teacher or staff member.

Audience Behavior

All members of the MSE community are expected to behave in an intelligent, responsible, caring, and respectful way. This is especially true when they are part of an audience. Students who are unable to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner may be subject to an incident report.

Lunch

Students will eat in the lunchroom. Please note that rooms such as the teacher's lounge are off-limits to students. Students are responsible for keeping the lunchroom clean.

EXPECTATIONS FOR ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

MSE students have a great deal of freedom. Even so, certain rules and boundaries are necessary to ensure that MSE is a productive and safe place for everyone. Some rules are required by law, for instance, policies on sexual harassment, substance abuse, and violence. Other policies, such as policies on tardiness and attendance, are designed by MSE school leaders. **Students are expected to follow all policies during their time at MSE.**

Plagiarism

Plagiarism means: **copying another piece of work and submitting it as one's own, original work.** The copied work could be a published piece (for example, from a book or a newspaper), another student's work, or text from the Internet including only minor changes.

If a student is aware that an MSE student has plagiarized, that person is expected to notify a teacher, advisor, or a trusted member of the MSE staff. While every case will be handled individually, MSE follows the guidelines given below to structure the consequences for plagiarism.

- The student meets with his/her advisor and is given a warning.
- The teacher notifies the student's parents/guardians.
- The parents/guardians, teachers, and student meet to discuss the incident.
- The student and advisor sign a contract that confirms the student's understanding of the consequences of plagiarism and commitment to avoid any future acts of plagiarism.
- The student completes the project or a comparable project to a level that meets the teacher's satisfaction.
- A second incident of confirmed plagiarism will result in a meeting with the advisor, student, parents/guardian, and principal, during which further disciplinary consequences will be determined.

Plagiarism is a serious offence. If you consider these consequences to be too harsh, remember that the purpose of a Montessori education is to prepare students' hearts and minds for the real world. Plagiarizing anything later in life can result in far more critical and long-lasting consequences.

Collaboration

The Montessori School of Englewood values collaboration—among students, among teachers, and between students and teachers. Collaboration is one of the school's Habits of Mind. For students, acceptable collaboration involves working together on group assignments, peer editing and assisting other students in understanding concepts.

However, there are times when students are expected to work independently. Collaboration is unacceptable if it takes the form of copying another's work or working together when a teacher specifically says not to. If a teacher decides that students have engaged in unacceptable collaboration, the project will be considered late and/or unrevisable. The teacher will also decide whether the project may be included in the student's portfolio. Once these conditions have been met, the students, teachers,

and advisor will sign a contract confirming students' understanding of the seriousness and consequences of unacceptable collaboration and commitment to avoid any future acts of it.

HOMWORK POLICY

Many middle school students struggle to consistently complete their homework. They may not understand how homework is helpful to them or they may just prefer to do other things. Some schools give out detentions to students for not doing their homework; others schools simply fail students who don't complete it.

MSE is committed to creating a middle school homework policy that will be meaningful for students, teachers, and families. Over the coming years, we expect not only to improve this policy, but also, and more importantly, student understanding and compliance.

- Homework requirements, conditions, and consequences will be established by each middle school teacher for that specific class.
- Homework policy must be discussed with students and teacher(s) during the first week of class.
- Families must be notified of the policy as soon as it is implemented.
- Each class policy is monitored and enforced by the teacher.
- "Homework guidelines" are *suggestions*
- "Consequences" for incomplete homework are intended to be *disciplinary*
- Consequences are recommended to be cumulative, and should be directed toward changing student behavior

GRADING

Grades are a needed component of the Middle School. Students will receive four grades per year at the end of each quarter. Students will also receive progress reports halfway through each quarter.

The following scale will be used to calculate students' letter grades:

- A. 90 - 100%
- B. 80 - 89%
- C. 70 - 79%
- D. 60 - 69%
- F. 59% and below

ACADEMIC STANDING

A student in good academic standing is one making satisfactory progress in all areas of the curriculum. Satisfactory progress is based on the expectations we hold for every student: we expect all students treat every new assignment as an opportunity to learn and to move toward meeting CPS targets and standards. Evaluation of student progress is also measured against the goals for each student outlined in their personalized portfolios.

A student is not in good academic standing if that student is failing to make satisfactory progress in one or more areas of the curriculum. Students not fulfilling the basic requirements and/or not making satisfactory progress of one class **may** be detained from participating in extracurricular and school activities.

PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

Special education services at MSE are provided in the context of the Montessori philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of individualized education for all students. All students, whether or not they receive special education services, has a Personal Learning Plan, which is similar in many ways to an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). The process of developing this plan includes parent and student input in assessing students' current progress and educational goals for the school year. Arrangements are also made to provide individual tutoring on a short-term basis when the need arises. Reflecting MSE's inclusive philosophy, most students with IEPs attend all regular classes for the entire school day.

MSE's Director of Student Supports (DoSS) oversees special education instruction, service coordination, data collection, case management, and compliance for MSE's special education program. The DoSS collaborates with other MSE leadership to provide ongoing case consultation to teaching staff. Families wishing more information on MSE's special education program should contact the DoSS.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL (COUNSELING) SUPPORTS

Counseling is available to all MSE students. We maintain contracts with highly qualified agencies to support our students' psychological and physical wellbeing. Among the specialized services provided are social-emotional supports, group and individual therapy, occupational therapy, speech language pathology, and school nursing services.

MSE's Behavior Specialist, supports students and families through crises and connects them with additional partners and services according to need and availability. The Behavior Specialist models and supports students in practicing healthful strategies for managing stress, regulating intense emotions, engaging in relational problem solving, and conflict resolution. Families wishing more information on MSE's programs of social-emotional support should contact the Behavior Specialist.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Every MSE student is expected to attend school on a regular basis and be on time for advisory and classes. Because MSE's academic expectations high, timely attendance is vital to ensuring academic progress.

Excused Absences

Excused absences include student illness, death in the family, religious holidays, school-sponsored activities, medical appointments, court appearance, and family emergencies approved by the MSE principal. **If a student will be absent or late, the parent or guardian must notify the school by contacting the main office at 773.535.9255 or emailing office@tmsoe.org.**

Parents/guardians must notify MSE of any prolonged medical absences due to illness, surgery, or other health-related concerns. If a child is absent and the school has not received prior notification regarding the absence, MSE will be contacted.

When an absence is excused the student may make up and submit missed work.

Students missing three schooldays/quarter are brought to the attention of the Middle School Director. If a student is making satisfactory academic progress and meeting obligations despite the absences, no further action will be necessary. However, if a student is not making satisfactory academic progress or not meeting other obligations, a conference with parents or guardians will be called.

Students who become ill or injured at school should report to the main office. No student will be dismissed early from school without receiving parental permission.

Unexcused Absences

Unexcused absences include skipping school or a class, a suspension, and failure to provide proper documentation of reasons for an excused absence. Work missed during an unexcused absence may not be made up or submitted without approval of the teacher. Students having multiple unexcused absences should expect to be referred by school faculty or staff to the principal who will determine further consequences.

Tardiness

Being absent or tardy is discourteous to the teacher and other members of the class. Repeated incidents of tardiness will be subject to consequences. Students who arrive after 8:05 are considered tardy and will need to go to the office to obtain a tardy slip.

A student's late arrival is excused if the parent/guardian has given appropriate notice by calling the attendance line before 8:00 a.m. or by sending in a signed note.

If a student is late three times per quarter it will count as one full day absence. Six or more tardies in a quarter, will result in a conference between the parent, teacher and administrator. Students arriving after 8:15 will not receive breakfast.

COMPUTER-USE POLICY

Internet Access

MSE offers Internet access to students, faculty, and staff. **Access to school computers and Internet service is a privilege, not a right.** The intent of MSE policy is to ensure that computer use is consistent with MSE's educational mission and core principles. The Computer-Use Contract on the following page is reviewed during middle school advisory one or more times during the school year. MSE Middle School students are expected to understand and sign the contract and share all information with their families.

Please note that users of MSE's computing and networking resources cannot assume absolute privacy. Users should expect that network connections will be monitored and computer files may be inspected.

The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires that all computers in a school or library must install and use Internet filters to protect users against content that is harmful, as defined by the Act. Minors, defined as children under the age of 17, cannot for any reason, request that the filters be turned off. MSE has installed filters to comply with the law. Faculty members do monitor student computer use and proactively guide students to make appropriate choices. However, MSE does not warrant the effectiveness of the Internet filter and cannot be held liable for damages.

Violations of MSE's computer use policy include:

- Deliberate access to inappropriate material on the Internet and World Wide Web.
- Unauthorized online access including hacking and other unlawful activities
- Unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal information
- Persistent nonacademic use of email, chat, messaging, and social media.

MSE reserves the right to deny, revoke or suspend specific user privileges and/or take other disciplinary action, including suspension or expulsion from school, for violations of this policy. In the event that there is a claim that a student has violated any of the guidelines in this policy he or she will be provided with written notice of the suspected violation and an opportunity to be heard. MSE will advise appropriate law enforcement agencies of illegal activities conducted through the school's Internet service.

Email:

Each classroom is provided with an email address. Classroom email accounts are for school work. Students using email will be expected to communicate in a responsible, ethical, and polite manner.

- Do not include personal identifying information about yourself or other students, such as your full name, address, or telephone number in outgoing email messages.
- Do not use the MSE computer network to send or receive email with your personal email account unless it is to send yourself schoolwork.

COMPUTER-USE CONTRACT FOR MSE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

As a member of the MSE Middle School Community, I will:

- Respect the privacy, safety, and confidentiality of myself and others by not disclosing or disseminating personal information on the Internet. This includes email, chat, and other forms of direct Internet communications and social media.
 - Respect computer and network equipment. I will not alter or access computer or network configurations without the knowledge and consent of the Network Administrator(s).
 - Not download or install software, music, or other programs from the Internet onto a school computer.
 - Understand that **software piracy is a federal offense**, and that MSE's network may not be used to copy, download, distribute, or store commercial software not licensed by MSE.
 - Abide by copyright laws. I will not plagiarize the works of others.
 - Understand that I am a representative of MSE on the Internet, and so will display the civility, control, and respect necessary to maintain credibility and respectability for both the school and myself.
 - Understand that I will not use my account, school computers, or school network to bully or harass others.
 - Understand that I am responsible for all activity on my account, even if I am not the person behind the keyboard. For this reason **I will keep my account secure** and not share my password with anyone else. I will not knowingly use someone else's computer account.
 - Understand that MSE is an educational community, and that education is its mission. For this reason, I will use the computer for recreation only outside of school hours, and will make way for students or staff needing a school computer for academic work or projects.
 - Understand that my actions on the Internet can have far-reaching consequences. I will therefore make deliberate decisions not to engage in behavior that might adversely affect the safety, security, or well-being of myself or be perceived as harassment by others.
 - Not access inappropriate websites or computer games that include pornography, obscene images, or language or are considered harmful to minors as defined by the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).
 - Ask questions regarding computer procedures when I do not know how to do something. Further, if I am unsure of what the consequences of a particular process might be, I will ask before acting.
-



THE **Montessori School**
of Englewood | A Chicago Public
Charter School

6936 South Hermitage Avenue | Chicago, Illinois 60636

Student signature

Date

POLICY FOR CELL PHONES, TABLETS, AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Cell-phone use is not allowed on school grounds. Students must turn in their cellphones at the beginning of the day to their teacher. The cellphone will be returned at the end of the day. If a student is caught using their cell phone during school hours the phone will be confiscated and subjected to a disciplinary action. If you need to get in touch with your child during school hours, please call the office.

BULLYING, HARASSMENT, AND RETALIATION

Definitions

MSE strictly prohibits the bullying, cyberbullying, harassment, teasing, name-calling, taunting, and intimidation of students.

Bullying, as defined in [Illinois](#) law, is “unwanted, aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time.”

Harassment includes any verbal or physical behavior directed toward someone that is experienced as degrading, unwanted, or intentionally provocative. Harassing behavior is any conduct that negatively affects another person’s academic status or progress, employment, and conduct, which creates an environment that is intimidating, hostile or offensive or that impacts benefits, services, or activities available to students.

Bullying and harassment could be committed by one or more students or by adults (e.g., school staff, adjunct instructor, volunteer, teacher, cafeteria worker, custodian, bus driver, or athletic coach). It can be a written, verbal, or electronic expression or a physical act or gesture or any combination of these things directed at a target that:

- Causes physical or emotional harm to the target or damage to the target’s property;
- Places the target in reasonable fear of harm or of damage to his/her property;
- Creates a hostile environment at school for the target;
- Infringes on the rights of the target at school; or
- Substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of a school.

Acts of bullying—including cyberbullying—are strictly prohibited:

- On school grounds and immediately adjacent property;
- At a school-sponsored or school-related activity, function, or program, whether on or off school grounds;
- At a school bus stop or on a school bus; or
- Through technology or devices owned, leased, or used by MSE or Chicago Public Schools.

Retaliation against a person who reports bullying, provides information during an investigation of bullying, or witnesses or has reliable information about bullying is also prohibited.

Reporting

All reports of bullying to the school will require the school to conduct an investigation of the incident, and will be documented. All reports are reviewed by the principal or designee to determine the appropriate response. Reporters need to understand that while the school will follow up with all reports, strict confidentiality laws prevent MSE from revealing information about students to adults other than their parents or guardians.

Reporting by staff

MSE staff members are required to report immediately any instances of suspected bullying or retaliation, and are also expected to intervene appropriately in the moment. Even if the staff member believes the situation was appropriately addressed, documentation is critical to determining whether there is a larger pattern or problem to address.

Reporting by students

Students may make a report either for themselves or on behalf of others. They may request assistance from a staff member to write a report, or they may report verbally to an adult who writes on their behalf. Reports may be made anonymously, but no formal disciplinary action can be taken solely on the basis of an anonymous complaint.

Reporting by parents, guardians, or others

MSE believes members of our community who witness or become aware of an instance of bullying will want to take action to keep our students safe. Reports may be made verbally or in writing to any staff member whom the witness feels comfortable contacting. Reports may be anonymous, although no disciplinary action can be taken on the basis of an anonymous complaint.

Response

The first priority in responding to an incident will be to restore a sense of safety and protect the alleged target from any further incidents while the circumstances are investigated. All communications will be in accordance with state and federal privacy laws and regulations. Upon determining that bullying or retaliation has occurred, the principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of each student involved, and will share with them MSE's procedures for responding. If the reported incident involves students from other schools, the principal or designee first informed of the incident will promptly notify by telephone the principal or designee of the other school(s) so that each school may take appropriate action. At any point after receiving a report of bullying or retaliation, including after an investigation, if the principal or designee has a reasonable basis to believe that criminal charges may be pursued against the aggressor, the principal will notify the Chicago Police Department.

Investigation and Determinations

The principal or designee will promptly investigate reported incidents. This will include conversations with students, staff, parents/guardians, and others as necessary. To the greatest extent possible, the principal or designee will maintain confidentiality during the investigation. A written record of the investigation shall be kept. The principal or designee will make a determination based upon all of the facts and circumstances. If, after investigation, bullying or retaliation is substantiated, the principal or designee will take steps aimed at preventing recurrence and ensuring that the target is not restricted in participating in school or in benefiting from school activities. Actions will include both educational/therapeutic steps aimed at preventing future occurrences and disciplinary action as

appropriate. The principal or designee will promptly notify the parents or guardians of the target and the aggressor about the results of the investigation and what action is being taken. Because of the legal requirements regarding the confidentiality of student records, the principal or designee cannot report specific information to the target's parent or guardian about disciplinary action taken unless it involves a "stay away" order or other directive that the target must be aware of in order to report violations.

If the principal or designee determines that a student knowingly made a false allegation of bullying or retaliation, that student may be subject to disciplinary action.

MSE is a small school where students are known well by many adults and where education is personalized to the maximum feasible extent. The responses taken in any situation where it is determined that bullying has occurred will necessarily be highly tailored to the particular needs of the student(s) involved.

For the targeted student(s), the highest priority will be promoting a sense of safety and personal strength and resilience. The school principal and counselors will meet with the targeted student to assess whether or not s/he feels safe or needs protection. The student's parents/guardians may also be consulted while making this determination. Depending on the circumstances, specific arrangements may be made to provide increased adult supervision, schedule adjustments, or other plans for keeping students separated, or a change in routines or plans that eliminate the situations that exacerbate the problem. The targeted student may also receive coaching and practice in how to face future challenges, and will identify a trusted adult to approach as needed.

For the aggressor(s), the response will seek a balance between discipline and education/intervention. Disciplinary responses will vary with the severity of the situation and the circumstances surrounding the incident. Interventions may include required counseling sessions, referrals for evaluation, behavior contracts, or classes to teach social skills.

Once a reasonable amount of time has passed, the principal or designee will follow up with the students, and determine whether additional action is needed.

HORSEPLAY POLICY

Horseplay is any behavior, which is perceived as unsafe, either by a participant or an observer. Some of the behaviors that are considered unsafe are:

- Picking students up so that both feet are not on the floor
- Hitting or punching
- Pushing or kicking
- Knocking students against a wall
- Swinging anything at another student that might result in injury
- Fooling around near breakable objects

Horseplay behaviors that are considered unsafe may actually or potentially harm someone.

Students are in violation of MSE's horseplay policy if they engage in any potentially unsafe behavior, even if no one gets hurt at the time it is observed. Teachers must warn all students if horseplay is observed.

The horseplay policy was instituted in the interest of student safety. One important aspect of any school is that students should be able to walk down the halls safely, without having to worry about being accidentally bumped into or knocked over. This policy is not the strictest one at MSE, and is usually only called into effect if students are fooling around in a way that others find potentially dangerous.

GANGS AND GANG ACTIVITY

Gang activity or overt displays of gang affiliation is considered the most serious of disruptive behaviors at MSE. A gang is defined by Chicago Public Schools as:

Any ongoing organization or group of three or more persons having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more **criminal acts**, which **has an identifiable name or identifying sign or symbol**, and whose members individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity. Gang activity means any act (e.g., recruitment with use of intimidation, tagging or marking, assault, battery, theft, trespassing, or extortion) performed by a gang member or on behalf of a gang, and intended to further a common criminal objective.

An overt display of gang affiliation means any act, for example, wearing clothing or paraphernalia, displaying gang signs, symbols, and signals, that signifies or exhibits affiliation with a gang. Gang activity and overt displays of gang affiliation can be implied from the character of the acts and the circumstances surrounding the misconduct. Repeated violations may result in a referral for an expulsion hearing.

Any MSE middle school student who violates this policy will be subject to intervention or consequences, including:

- Skill-building in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or combination in-school and out-of-school suspension. When the suspension is assigned, MSE will create a plan for preventing future behavior incidents, restoring relationships, and addressing student needs.

- Recommended instructive, corrective, or restorative response
- Request for assignment to an intervention program
- Request for disciplinary reassignment to another CPS school, or to an alternative school program for a set term
- Request for expulsion hearing
- Revocation of network privileges for up to two years for behaviors involving improper use of the CPS network or information technology devices

STATE AND FEDERAL LAWS

Gun Prohibition

Illinois prohibits the possession or carrying of any firearm, stun gun, or taser in any elementary school. This includes on or near person or in a vehicle on school grounds, or in any vehicle used by a school to transport students. No guns are allowed within 1,000 feet of the school.

Illinois adopted the federal Gun Free Schools Act of 1994, which states that a school board must expel for at least one year any student who possesses a firearm or other weapon at school or any school-sponsored activity. The expulsion period may be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the principal. A student subject to suspension or expulsion may be eligible for a transfer to an alternative school program. The principal is required to notify the receiving school of the reasons for the student's expulsion. The expelled student has the right to appeal to the principal within ten (10) days of the expulsion determination, and may retain counsel for the hearing.

Drugs and Alcohol Prohibition

Drugs (controlled or illegal substances) and alcohol are not allowed at MSE. Any student who is involved in the sale, use, possession, and/or distribution of drugs or alcohol at school or on school property is subject to expulsion.

Smoking and Tobacco Products

MSE is a tobacco-free zone. No person—teachers, administrators, students, parents, visitors, and MSE employees—may smoke or use any tobacco products in the school building or school facility, anywhere on school grounds, or on any school bus. This prohibition includes during school activities that take place off school property.

School Searches and Student Privacy

Under Illinois law, searches of students' lockers, desks, and personal property (e.g., backpacks) are allowable on school property. School authorities are permitted to search and inspect those and similar places without prior notice or consent of the students, and without a search warrant.

ANTIDISCRIMINATION POLICY

Definitions

The Montessori School of Englewood is committed to equal employment and educational opportunity for all members of the school community, and prohibits discrimination on the basis of the basis of race, color, gender, religion, gender identity, age, national origin, sexual orientation, homelessness, or disability, in the operation of the educational programs, activities, or employment policies. MSE complies with all applicable state and federal laws, including Title VI, Title VII, Title IX, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Students are protected from discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age and disability in areas such as: admission to school, classroom assignment, participation in courses or support services, assessments, school sponsored extra-curricular activities and competitive athletics, graduation requirements and student rules.

Procedures for Resolving Grievances

Students having a concern about discrimination or harassment should inform an adult in the school community—an advisor, teacher, or counselor. That person will take the appropriate steps to attempt to resolve the situation. This may include discussion with the involved persons, identifying and questioning of witnesses and other appropriate steps. You may also bring your complaint to and obtain assistance from the principal. In most cases, a fair and timely resolution will be achieved.

The goals of the above grievance procedures are to resolve complaints in manner and to ensure compliance with nondiscriminatory practices. Additionally, reprisals or retaliation against any individual who reports on, or files a discrimination or harassment complaint is strictly prohibited. Any employee or member of the school community found to have engaged in harassment will be subject to sanctions, including but not limited to, a warning, or suspension for students, and a warning, suspension or termination of employment for staff.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Definitions

Sexual harassment in student-to-student interactions involves unwelcome sexual advances; requests for sexual favors; and other unwanted verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Unwanted **verbal behaviors** include as unwanted sexual or lewd comments, suggestions, jokes, innuendoes, offensive name-calling, pressure for dates, offensive sounds such as whistling or making kissing sounds, talking about or calling attention to another's gender or sexuality in a negative or embarrassing way and spreading sexual rumors.

Unwanted **nonverbal behaviors** include suggestive looks or leering, staring, facial expressions and gestures, blocking a person's path, following a person, laughing at a person who is being harassed, or displaying nude or sexual pictures, cartoons and calendars.

Unwanted **physical behaviors** include pats; squeezes; touching a person's clothing, hair, or body; pinching; brushing against another's body; and forced physical contact of any kind.

Procedures for Dealing with Harassment

MSE takes an assertive and active role in protecting its students and staff from sexual harassment. A person who believes she or he is being harassed is encouraged to inform the person behaving in an unwanted manner that the behavior is offensive and request that it stop. If the person chooses not to raise the matter with the alleged harasser, or if after the request the behavior continues, then the situation should be reported.

Staff should bring concerns immediately to a supervisor or administrator. Students should bring their concerns to an adult—a teacher, advisor, the principal, counselor, or adult with whom the student is comfortable. We encourage students to tell their parents/guardians of any incidents of sexual harassment; parents should then notify school personnel.

All reports are taken seriously and an appropriate investigative action will be initiated with appropriate follow-up. It is never appropriate to tell the person who complains of harassment to ignore or to make light of their concern.

The principal is responsible for ensuring that harassment complaints are dealt with in accordance with MSE procedure. The principal will review harassment complaints and will document and maintain records.

Many times, situations involving nonphysical harassment of a student by a student may be quickly and quietly resolved if the harasser and the complainant can sit down and talk things over with a third party. However, if this is not possible or appropriate and the investigation concludes that harassment did occur, disciplinary action will follow. Disciplinary actions may include warning that such behavior must cease, verbal and/or written reprimands, suspension and ultimately termination of employment, exclusion from school, and/or referral to the appropriate municipal or state agency.

Informal Process

It is often possible to resolve an offensive situation informally without an extensive and involved investigation. The principal, or designee, has the authority to conduct an informal investigation of complaints of harassment. Examples of how harassment can be investigated and resolved include:

- With the consent of the complainant, a facilitated conversation between the two parties where the complainant tells the respondent that the behavior is offensive and must stop.
- The complainant is assisted in writing a letter to the respondent saying that the behavior is offensive and must stop.
- The DoSES, the principal, or designee holds separate conversations with the complainant and the respondent.

Examples of possible resolutions include verbal statement of apology, letters of apology, and other forms of assurances that the offensive behavior will end.

MSE will investigate complaints within five (5) school days. Within this time the principal, or designee, will notify all involved parties of the results of the Informal Process. Resolution of the situation may or may not occur as a result of the Informal Process. If all the parties involved in this Informal Process feel that a resolution has been achieved, this discussion will remain confidential and no further action will be taken, except that the Principal will maintain documentation of the process. If any party feels that resolution has not been achieved, participants will engage in the following Formal Procedure. Investigative deadlines may be extended under extenuating circumstances such as illness or an excessive number of individuals to interview.

Formal Procedure

A complainant at any time may request a formal investigation by the principal. Based on the seriousness of the charge, the principal may decide that a formal investigation is the most appropriate way to address the issues. A formal investigation is initiated when one of the following three criteria are met:

- Any of the parties involved requests the formal procedure.
- The principal initiates the formal procedure due to the seriousness of the allegations or repeated behavior.
- Any one of the parties feels that the informal procedure was inadequate or unsuccessful.

Within twenty (20) school days of receiving the formal complaint, the principal will investigate all relevant information pertaining to the matter and shall render a decision. The decision will be delivered to the parties involved in writing.

Within twenty (20) school days of receiving the decision, either party may appeal that decision to the Board of Trustees of the Montessori School of Englewood.

Within twenty (20) school days of receiving that appeal, the Officers of MSE's Board of Trustees will review and evaluate all relevant information pertaining to the complainant and shall render a decision in writing to the parties involved.

Retaliation

It is unlawful to retaliate in any form against any person who has filed a complaint for harassment or who has cooperated in an investigation of a complaint of harassment. If retaliation occurs, it can be considered grounds for dismissal of staff and/or exclusion from school of a student.

Confidentiality

Reports of harassment are kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, involving as few people as possible, with the goal of protecting both parties and stopping the behavior. Once an MSE staff member receives a complaint that person must document the incident in writing and give to the principal within one working day of the time of receipt.

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION POLICY

This handbook lays out the policies and expectations for all members of the MSE community. While students and teachers will work together to ensure an environment that is safe and conducive to learning and teaching, there may be times when the conduct of one or more students requires disciplinary action that excludes the student(s) from MSE and its community. A student may be removed from the school immediately, and for up to two (2) school days, if her or his continued presence poses either a danger to persons or property, or significantly disrupts the educational practices of the school. For more information, see the MSE Code of Conduct manual.