



Big City Montessori School

Parent / Guardian Handbook

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Welcome to BCMS!

Welcome!

Welcome to Big City Montessori School (BCMS). We are excited that you have become part of the BCMS family. Together we will be able to give your child a wonderful first school experience. Your child will grow and develop many skills that will lead to life-long learning. This parent handbook will give you a greater understanding of BCMS and the Montessori Method.

BCMS Mission Statement

We believe education is preparation for life. By fostering cooperation, respect for oneself and others, we empower our children to be confident and self-motivated individuals with a life-long enthusiasm for learning.

BCMS History

In 1972 Meighen and Robert Tideman founded Westlake Montessori School. Their vision was to create an environment where children from all walks of life could have a space outside of the home to feel comfortable and learn.

BCMS moved to its current location, the “big city” of San Francisco, in 1980 and thus changed the name to Big City Montessori School. This was the year that the current Owner / Directress, their daughter Amanda Riccetti, began her work in Montessori. Beginning with after school care, taking her turn with Montessori teaching, and taking over as Owner / Directress in 1999. Amanda has touched every role within the school. This experience gives her a great deal of understanding and helps her keep the tenure of her staff, which directly relates to the emotional security of your child.

Since its inception 50 years ago, BCMS has successfully provided a safe and nurturing environment for children, graduating students to the finest schools in San Francisco.

A Letter from the Founder of BCMS

January 2007

Dear Parents:

I chose Montessori for my daughter, Amanda when she was three years old. I had read a lot about the method and everything about it appealed to me. A year later her sister Marijke joined her at Gateway Montessori School in San Francisco.

After two years of watching their response to a Montessori education, I decided to take the training and become a Montessori teacher myself. This would enable me to work and still have time with my children.

I graduated with honors from the Montessori Education Center in Palo Alto in 1969. This center was accredited by the Association Montessori Internationale and was headed by Lena Wickramaratne, who had been trained by Dr. Montessori herself.

After graduation I was invited by Ms. Wickramaratne to join the center as a teacher in the laboratory school and as an assistant teacher trainer. While I was working there a parent approached me one day after school and said she thought I ought to have my own school and that if I was willing to try she would lend me the capital to begin. She had two little girls in my class and she used to sit in the observation room and watch the class in session. She liked my teaching style and wanted to help me have my own school.

Things fell miraculously into place when another parent told me her brother was a minister and that his church was in financial trouble and needed to find another source of income. I met with the minister and asked to rent the social hall as a Montessori classroom, and thus began Westlake Montessori School in 1972.

After working there for 8 years another minister came to the church and he didn't want to continue the lease so I found another building and moved my school into San Francisco, out of the suburbs and into the "big city", and thus was born Big City Montessori School in 1980.

Meanwhile, my daughter Amanda was growing up in the school, helping to clean and paint on Saturdays, doing chores in the office, working part time in the after school care program while she was in school, and then working full time after finishing school.

She is still there. All of my children were educated there and my grandchildren and great-granddaughter as well. I have retired and passed the school on to Amanda, who is doing a better job than I ever did.

Sincerely,
Meighen Tideman
Founder/Montessori Educator

What is Montessori?

A Teacher and Her Method



Dr. Maria Montessori was the first educator to realize the capacity of young children to learn and to systematically examine how the young child learns best. She believed that all children have a natural desire to learn and given the opportunity will absorb everything in their culture and environment. She identified the most sensitive period for learning as that between birth to age six. The Montessori Method has been proven for over 100 years and is known and taught world-wide.

Dr. Montessori once said:

~“The most important period of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to the age six. For that is the time when man’s intelligence itself, his greatest implement, is being formed.”

~“The essence of independence is to be able to do something for one’s self.”

~“Adults work to finish a task, but the child works in order to grow, and is working to create the adult, the person that is to be. Such experience is not just play...it is work he must do in order to grow up.”

The Montessori philosophy and curriculum fosters love of learning and self-growth. Through the work, children develop tools for learning that will prepare them for life.

The Sensitive Periods

Sensitive periods are times in the child's life when they are driven by nature to acquire a new skill or concept. During this time, learning will be easier than any other time in life. Here are just a few examples: From newborn to two years of age, they are in the sensitive stage of language; from three to five years of age, they are refining small motor skills, such as forming letters; and from four to six years of age, they are refining reading skills.

The Curriculum

The Montessori Curriculum is an integrated thematic approach that ties together separate disciplines into studies of the physical universe, the world of nature, and the human experience. In this way, one lesson leads to many others.

Each material isolates one concept or skill that has been specially designed so children are naturally drawn to work with it. Each material has also been designed so a child can check his own work – what Montessori calls “control of error.” These are tools that lead to independence, and that let children see abstract ideas presented in concrete, three-dimensional ways. The tools also help them grasp and understand what they are working on, and allow each child to work at their own pace.

The curriculum is divided into 4 areas: Practical Life, Sensorial, Language (which includes Mathematics), and Cultural (which includes Sciences, Geography, and Art). The curriculum is always developing and growing with the children.

The Environment

The “prepared environment” of the Montessori classroom sets the stage for learning. The children are free to work and learn independently, choosing and engaging in purposeful activities. The teacher's role is to facilitate the environment. Concentration, inner discipline, and motivation develop naturally as the children discover and explore.

The other most important aspect to a Montessori environment is the mixed-age groups. Older children become teachers while developing leadership skills. Younger children observe and assimilate what they see and hear from the older children. Often the result is that when the teacher is ready to give a lesson to a younger child, they already have a grasp of it or already know it.

As children work at their own pace, engaging in age and developmentally appropriate activities, they become problem solvers, leaders, challenge seekers, and develop a greater self-awareness.

In this prepared environment, children absorb everything that is part of their culture and acquire tools they will need for life skills. They do this without getting tired or fatigued. The teacher is both part of this learning environment and the dynamic link between it and the learner. The teacher's mission is to create a safe, beautiful and enriched environment where children can learn to master and develop their natural skills for life.

Practical Information

BCMS has a structured schedule. This structure is necessary to maintain consistency for both the child and the program. In the classroom there is a balance between direct and indirect instruction. The mixed-age classroom allows for accelerated social-emotional growth and increased exposure to language. Reading and writing derive almost exclusively from exposure to language.

The large classrooms provide opportunity for many social interactions. The Montessori Method relies on peer teaching and modeling. Instead of children relying only on adults to provide direction, they look to one another. The enriched environment is a framework for your child's development, supporting individualized learning in addition to the Montessori Method.

The Year of Mastery

Kindergarten at BCMS

The year of BCMS Kindergarten (age 5 to 6) is one of completion. **The child masters all areas of work.** He/she becomes the leader, the one others look up to for support and guidance. BCMS Kindergarten children become teachers as they help the little ones tie shoes or with completing a puzzle. They love to feel how much they understand compared to younger classmates. Math, language, and writing take up the majority of their class time.

The best way to sum up the three-year process may be to look at each year in terms of the following stages: Explorer, Experimenter and Expert. The two and half to three-year-olds are Explorers, absorbing everything going on in the environment. The four to five-year-old is an Experimenter, who now confidently moves through the materials he/she so carefully observed the year before. The five to six-year-old is the Teacher, who is mastering all the work, teaching others, and combining and applying his/her knowledge to bigger endeavors (writing sentences to go with the picture he/she created, taking pride in his/her ability to move from the concrete to abstract with math problems, etc.).

Several important differences between what BCMS offers the five-year-old and what is offered by many of today's kindergarten programs:

- BCMS engages the young child in **“learning how to learn”**. The mixed-age classes provide our kindergarteners with abundant opportunities to develop leadership skills, responsibility, experience a greater social diversity. Another key point is interest and readiness for advanced work. If a child is not ready to move on, they are not left behind or made to feel like a failure, and if a child is advanced, the sky is the limit. Young five-year-olds who miss the cut-off date for kindergarten will be able to complete our program and have the opportunity to attend traditional kindergarten or go directly to first grade.
- BCMS is focused on **“teaching for understanding”** - not for testing. The child in a BCMS Kindergarten is ready to reinforce and internalize. The opportunities of freedom of choice, movement and communication help develop inner discipline. The child's freedom to repeat an activity develops concentration, which Montessori says is the only true foundation for education.

- BCMS teaches and expects much more than competency in the basic skills. We want the children to **enjoy school and feel good about themselves as students**. We know this takes place in the Kindergarten year. This is done through the absorbent mind and the sensitive periods as explained by Dr. Montessori; according to her, these periods diminish around age six.

If a child has not had time to internalize these early concrete experiences, as they would during BCMS Kindergarten, their early learning often evaporates because it is neither reinforced nor commonly understood.

Once your child had developed a high degree of self-confidence, independence, and enthusiasm for the learning process, they can adapt to all sorts of new situations. They blossom into children who are ready for the new adventures ahead of them.

By the end of age five BCMS children are curious, self-confident learners who look forward to going to school. They are engaged, enthusiastic learners who honestly want to learn and ask questions. They also respect themselves, others, and the environment.

The BCMS education is the bridge to life-long learning; BCMS Kindergarten is the strength of the bridge.

Our Staff

Professionally Trained Teachers

BCMS has 5 fantastic **AMI Montessori credentialed teachers**. In each class we have (1) one *HEAD* Montessori teacher who is supported by (3) three highly trained **ECE accredited assistants**. In addition, we have support staff of additional ECE accredited assistants, outside of the classroom, who work as part of our team.

Our head staff and Directors all have CPR and First Aid training that is updated every two years.

The School Director is:

Mrs. Amanda Riccetti

The School Co-Director is:

Ms. Hilma Perez

The Head AMI Montessori Teachers are:

Mrs. Evelyn Castillo

Mrs. Amanda Riccetti

Mrs. Soumya Lokumalage

At BCMS each child is assigned to a classroom and stays with the same teacher for the entire length of time they are in our program. **The average tenure of our teaching staff is 8 to 15 years**. This benefits your child greatly, as our long tenured staff means more stability and consistency for your child. The teachers are able to observe your child's progress over time, know what they are ready for next, their strengths and weaknesses, and their individual personalities as they mature in our program. Additionally, it means so much to children when their community of classmates and friends is consistent and stays intact.

Monthly Faculty Meeting

BCMS supports life-long learning - just as Maria Montessori believed. At BCMS we never assume we are reaching our full potential, and want to bring training and growth to our teachers and new perspectives to our students.

BCMS closes early, at 3:00 p.m., the third Friday of every month, for staff development meetings. It is a chance for the staff to come together as a whole, look to the future, and renew our commitment to bring each child to his or her maximum potential.

You are responsible to reference the school year closure calendar and plan accordingly. There will be no childcare available after 3:00 p.m. on early closure days. **Late pick up, after 3:00 p.m., will be charged at \$2.00 per minute.**

Should you need to reference the school closure dates calendar you can find it posted on our website "Resources" page.

BCMS and Your Child

Planning for a New and Exciting Experience

Letting Go

The first day often goes well. But, it's the second and the third day for some children that may be more challenging. Your child may go through separation anxiety. This is real and can last two to three weeks.

Many parents think if they stay for two or three minutes and get their child to play, they can sneak out and all will be wonderful. This actually makes the child *very* upset and *very* confused when they find you have left. They will become less trusting, and this may lead to a longer transition.

If your child is having difficulty separating from you, the best way to drop off is to ask a teacher to help you say goodbye quickly, and let your child see you leave. This will give your child a chance to start bonding with us and settle down. The sooner you separate and leave, the sooner your child will become engaged and forget their sadness at drop off.

Believe it or not, letting go is often harder on the parent than the child. Some children simply dislike the change of environment: Leaving home, getting out of the car, or going home from school. We understand how difficult separation is for both parents and children, and we are here to support you.

What to Bring, What to Leave at Home

Cubby

Each child is assigned a cubby of their own. Extra clothes, outerwear and personal items are placed in a child's cubby. It is a great help if you get your child familiar with the location of his/her cubby. Get him/her to show you their cubby and help them learn to put their coat inside. A child's cubby is very important personal space that helps them feel a sense of belonging. Never let your child put food or toys in their cubby. We want to prevent ants and children from temptation.

Please do not bring your child's belongings in a backpack. The cubbies are very small and a backpack will not fit inside. We want to prevent any confusion as to where to find your child's items, and prevent the loss of a favorite backpack.

Extra Set of Clothing

BCMS supplies a great deal of what your child needs for the school day. However, we do need you to bring in a set of extra clothing, labeled with your child's name (please also include socks and a pair of shoes). Children are more comfortable changing into their own things should there be a toileting accident, or spill at lunch, etc. **All clothes should be labeled with your child's name, and then placed in a gallon-size zip lock bag with your child's name written on the outside.** This is kept in your child's inside school cubby at all times, so it is available whenever necessary.

In the event that your child's clothes become soiled and need to be changed, we will place their soiled clothes in a plastic bag labeled with their name and reason for clothing change and place it in their outside cubby for you to take home and wash. We encourage you to check in on your child's spare clothes supply periodically to make sure they have a full set of spare clothes available at school. Also, it's a good idea to check and make sure that they have not outgrown their spare set and to replenish your child's set of spare clothes as necessary. If there are no spare clothes available in your child's cubby, we will change them into spare "Big City" clothes, assuming we have some in your child's size. If your child goes home in Big City's spare clothes, please wash them at your earliest convenience and return them to the school.

Comfort Items for Nap Time

If your child needs a pacifier, bottle, sippy cup, or comfort item for nap time, you may bring that, too. Again, please label or write your child's name on these items and give them to either your child's teacher or the office.

Appropriate Clothing

Children must have clothes that fit comfortably and that they can manage. This fosters independence and self-esteem. To avoid potty accidents, please do not have pants that require a belt that may be difficult to remove. Please help us keep the children safe by sending your child in shoes they can manage by themselves. This will give the teacher more time to keep their eyes on the children and keep them all safe.

Please do not send your child to school in clothing that you do not want ruined (i.e., garments of great sentimental and/or monetary value). Although we teach the children how to work neatly and carefully, they are children after all and they may stain or rip their clothing while at school. **We are not responsible for any stains or damages to clothing that your child wears to school.**

Please take special note of the following:

Do not send your child to school wearing flip flop sandals, open toe sandals or Crocs.

This is a matter of safety. These types of shoes are not intended for everyday use. Children need support for their growing feet. Each one of these types of shoes has no support, they easily come off, children's feet can be injured, and they can easily trip when they are running and playing.

When your child wears a **skirt** or **dress** to school, please have them **wear shorts or leggings underneath**. This is for their personal privacy when playing outside, sitting on the floor in a circle lesson or during work time.

No Media Policy

Please do not send your child to school wearing clothing with “commercial” characters.

(i.e., Spiderman, Sponge Bob, Disney Princesses, Hello Kitty, Thomas the Train, etc.) Parents - please don't underestimate the influence of television and media on young children! Our pre-school children's brains are in a very sensitive stage of mimicking and acting out what they observe, and not being able to distinguish between fantasy and reality. We want to keep our environment, and our young children sweet, gentle, creative, stress free, and innocent for a bit longer, without the harmful effects of the media industry's products.

You may think, “What's the big deal? My son loves his “Spiderman” shoes / My daughter loves her “Frozen” shirt....”

What's the big deal? **Bottom line – it disturbs our school learning environment.** You are sending your children here to build their social/emotional and cognitive foundation; a foundation which is built on **reality** during these critical early years. They will have lessons and experiences with geography, art, math, culture, language, physical movement and motor skills, self-care, manners, social skills, and so much more! However, if media enters our school environment (even if it is on just one t-shirt) it goes “viral”, becomes the focus of children's attention, and distracts them from these essential foundational skills we want to teach and you want them to have.

Media is intentionally exciting, colorful, and grabs the “barbaric” undeveloped brain. For example, the children see a Spiderman t-shirt and the children want to *become* Spiderman. Now the children want to play out capturing bad guys, shoot at each other, play fight, only want to draw Spiderman pictures and suddenly the topic is Spiderman throughout the entire school. And these are children who have not even seen the movie or cartoon – only a t-shirt!

Alternately, **when young children are allowed to use their experience and knowledge base of reality their creative imaginations can lead the way!** They play “family”, “store”, imitate and pretend to be animals, play soccer, baseball, draw pictures of flowers and butterflies, and sing and dance together. Media products “insert” mature ideas and role models into young immature brains that are not yet able to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

Some parents have asked for examples of what characters / media *are*, and *are not*, appropriate to wear or bring to school?

The short answer is that, ideally, we would like to eliminate *ALL* media from our school.

However, as a general rule of thumb / guideline:

- If your child's book, bag, clothing, shoes, cap/hat, underwear, sweater or jacket are "**reality based**" in their embellishment, they are **likely fine for school** (i.e. - anything found in the **real world** - animals, insects, flowers, rockets, astronauts, planets, sports, as well as solid colors, stripes, polka dots, and other geometric patterns, etc.).
- If your child's book, bag, clothing, shoes, cap/hat, underwear, sweater or jacket are "**fantasy based**" in their embellishment, they are **likely NOT OK for school** (i.e. - anything **NOT found in the real world** – super heroes, fairies, dragons, mermaids, ninjas, weapons of *any* kind, movie or TV show characters, cartoon characters (even if "educational" they are **NOT REAL** - trains, cars and animals do not talk in the real world, etc.).

Again, our goal is to be a reality based, media-free school, to protect our young children's brains during these crucial early years. We need your support to make this happen. We hope the above examples will give you some general guidance when dressing your child for BCMS preschool.

If you ever have questions around this, or are un-sure about what is appropriate / what is not, please do not hesitate to contact us at the school office.

Outer Clothing

Please be sure to write your child's name legibly on all outer clothing, and show him/her how to put it their cubby. Try to send the same jacket or sweater each time; this way we can get used to what your child wears, and it will help keep your child's outer clothing from getting lost. BCMS is not responsible for lost items. With coats falling out of cubbies and different people picking up and dropping off children, things will go missing at times. Writing your child's name inside his/her jacket will help ensure that favorite jacket or sweater will come back home.

Rainy/Cold Days

BCMS has a creative staff to keep the children engaged, should weather prohibit scheduled outside play. If possible, we request that you pick up your child a little early on these days - as staying inside for the entire day is hard on the children.

If you bring your child to school on a rainy-day wearing rain boots and toting an umbrella, please remember that these items are too large to fit in their cubby.

Umbrellas can be closed and left in the front lobby in our umbrella container for retrieval upon exit.

We ask that you please change your child from boots into shoes upon arrival in the front lobby and **leave rain boots in the lobby as well.**

Sunny Days

Please **apply sunscreen** to your child in the morning on sunny days. We will apply it again later in the day when the children go outside to play.

If you have a specific sunscreen that you would like us to put on your child, please bring it to school, label it with your child's name, and give it to their teacher. We will store it here for use, and notify you when it is time to bring more.

If your child has especially sensitive skin, bringing a sun **hat** for them to wear when going outside is a good idea. It can be kept in their inside cubby and be retrieved whenever needed. The teachers will help to remind your child to wear their hat. Again, please write your child's name inside the hat to prevent loss.

Lost and Found

When looking for a missing item, please check your child's cubby (and surrounding cubbies) first. If you still need help to find a lost item, please email the office and we will help you try to find it. Please note: BCMS is not responsible for lost or broken items.

Please Leave Toys and Jewelry at Home

A shiny bracelet, fuzzy bear, or special toy can create big problems in a preschool environment. In addition to a child losing a favorite item, it opens the possibility of an argument with a classmate or distraction from a class lesson. **The item becomes the focus of attention. It's best to leave these items at home.** We realize some children are carriers and need to bring things with them. It is best to leave the item in the car. If your child is just not willing to give up the item when you drop them off, the teacher will have the child bring it to the office to turn in later. At this point, we will place the item in their outside cubby, to bring home. As an exception, we do allow younger children to bring in comfort items to help self-soothe during nap time.

BCMS Routine

Signing In and Out

Every child must be "signed in" and "signed out" of school by an authorized adult – a parent, or your authorized relative, caregiver, or family friend. Signing in and out daily is a requirement of our licensing agency, the California Department of Social Services.

To help you to not forget to sign in/out your child each day, you should make it your first priority upon entering the school facility.

At BCMS, we utilize an electronic keypad system for signing the children into and out of school. Every person authorized to drop off or pick up your child from school must be assigned an individual electronic PIN (Personal Identification Number) that is used to sign the child into and out of the system. This PIN is an "electronic signature" and must be unique to each individual person. **NEVER give your PIN to anyone else to use.** Additionally, never let your child press the buttons on the keypad to check in or out. **The key pad is for adult use only.** Should you need to add an authorized contact to drop off or pick up your child, **we must receive your authorization in writing and with your signature** (either via hand written note,

or via e-mail). When giving your written authorization please list the person's first and last name, relationship to you (i.e., grandparent, family friend, nanny, etc.), and the date and time they will drop off or pick up, and your signature. **You must also add your approved contact to your brightwheel account, which will automatically generate a PIN# for them.** Please direct your new contact to come to the office. We will ask them for a photo ID the first time they come (to ensure they are the person you have authorized) and help them drop off or locate your child. We will never allow anyone who is not authorized by you to take your child from our facility.

No Cell Phone Policy

BCMS is a cell phone free zone. **We kindly request that you do not talk on your cell phone (text, check e-mails, browse the web, etc.) once you have entered the school.** You are welcome to use your phone to place or receive calls in our front lobby if you need to. This is for the respect and safety of your child, and to maintain the order of the school. Phone calls are distracting and require concentration. Your child is separating from you, or has not seen you all day. Your child desires and needs your *full* attention when they are being dropped off, and especially when they are being picked up

The Basic Daily Routine

BCMS opens at 8:00 a.m. and all Montessori classes end at 3:00 p.m. Lunch is at staggered times by class, and is served between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. Children eat with their class in their classroom. Nap time is from approximately 12:30 to 3:00 p.m. Children who nap generally nap after their class lunch. Afternoon childcare begins at 3:00 p.m. and the school closes at 5:30 p.m.

The First Two Weeks

The first few days are difficult for both parents and children. Tears may occur, but our dedicated staff will welcome your child and help with this difficult time. Some children may cry at drop off. But, for your reassurance, this is almost always short lived and truthfully is only a display for your benefit; it is your child's way of telling you they love you, this is hard for them, and they still need you. Having said all this, **the sooner you go, the sooner your child will settle in and trust us.** The longer you stay and try to settle your child in, the more upset they will become when you finally leave. Remember - never sneak out. This will upset your child and teaches your child not to trust adults.

It is common for children who never cried when being dropped off at daycare, etc. to start for the first time when they begin at BCMS. We want to reassure you this is completely normal and is part of separation anxiety. Your child is going to another stage of awareness that you are dropping them off and going. Once again, the quick goodbye shows your child you are not concerned at all and you know your child is safe and will have a wonderful day.

Food - Snacks and Lunch

BCMS provides a nutritious "home cooked" lunch and two healthy snacks a day. Snack is served in the morning and during the afternoon program. Every month our staff designs a different lunch and snack menu which consists of wholesome foods that still appeal to the children. We provide a different lunch each day of the week, rotating through the month. We change out our menu from month to month. **The majority of our menu items are prepared fresh daily in our own kitchen.** For your convenience, each month you will receive the lunch and snack menu in the current month's newsletter. You can also find the monthly menu printed

and posted in the front lobby and inside the school in the front vestibule and posted in the hallway.

BCMS goes through cases of fresh fruit each week, and we serve Clover 1% organic milk (*1% milk is required by CA State Licensing*). Some of the children at BCMS have severe food allergies. We request that parents do not bring in food from home, unless there is a special arrangement with the office. (***PLEASE NOTE: BCMS does not allow any NUT products.*** We have children at BCMS with severe allergies!) Be sure to let us know if your child has any dietary restrictions and we will work with you to ensure your child has healthy meals at school.

Nap Time

Naps are not mandatory at BCMS, as we will never force a child to go to sleep. Our nap time starts at around 12:30 p.m. and ends around 3:00 p.m. **Children generally take a nap right after their class eats lunch.** Each child has a cot, pillow, and blanket assigned to them for the entire time they nap here at BCMS. Older children, who are growing out of a formal nap, may transition to rest in a quiet area of the classroom with a cushioned mat, pillow, and blanket. A child can request to take a nap if they feel they need one, at any time. BCMS will never make a child nap. The teachers may ask for your assistance if your child is having difficulty and will not nap for them.

Afternoon Program

The BCMS afternoon program follows the same principles of the Montessori class time: Respect for each other, for self, and for the environment. The program starts at 3 p.m. and ends at 5:30 p.m. It is an opportunity for the teachers to bring out open-ended activities such as thematic and dramatic play, arts and crafts projects, building with manipulatives, group games, etc. It's also another opportunity to play outside (weather permitting). The children are served an afternoon snack during this time period as well.

After Hours Emergency Care

BCMS closes promptly at 5:30 p.m. The teachers have worked a long day and are ready to go home to their families. We understand there may be situations beyond your control that might keep you from picking up your child on time. BCMS does provide emergency care under these circumstances. We charge by the minute and have no grace period. **Emergency care is provided at a rate of \$2.00 per minute.** Please call us to alert us of your need for emergency care. One of the teachers will stay behind for you, **so please pay the teacher directly, in cash, when you arrive** (or the next day if you do not have cash payment with you).

Special Events

Birthdays at BCMS

At BCMS we do not allow any "food parties" which means, no cookies / cupcakes / juice boxes / sweets during the school day. While it's important to us to acknowledge and celebrate your child and their special day, it's also important to us to do it in a really meaningful way, which also allows for us to respect students and families who have specific dietary restrictions, preferences, and also to reinforce healthier eating habits in general.

Here's how we celebrate birthdays at BCMS:

1. *On your child's actual birthday*, we do a special **"Montessori" birthday ceremony** to appreciate and celebrate your child for the wonderful and unique human being that they are! We do the ceremony during the morning circle time. Part of the ceremony is showing their classmates pictures of themselves to see how they have grown and changed over the years.
 - For the ceremony, we request that you **bring in photo prints (1 per age)** of your child when they were a newborn/baby, age 1 yr. old, 2 yrs. old, 3 yrs. old, 4 yrs. old, etc. They can be in any size.
 - Please **write on the back of each print** something that your child did at that age.
 - Please bring the prints no later than **the day before your child's actual birthday**, so your child's teacher has time to prepare for their ceremony. (Note: Any child's birthday that falls on the weekend or on a school closure date / holiday or break will have a ceremony on the prior Friday, or the following Monday.) You can give the prints directly to your child's teacher, or to the office staff.
 - After your child's ceremony, we will place their birthday pictures on the classroom wall to admire and then we will send them home after one month.

We also take pictures of the ceremony, and share them with you via your brightwheel student feed, so you can see your child's special ceremony.

Parents as Partners

Working Together for Success

Communication

At BCMS, communication between school and home is absolutely key for your child's success in our program. We can confidently say that you will receive more detailed information from us about your child during their time with us than you will ever receive in any other school program your child will attend. This is simply because, while in our care, your child will be rapidly going through a great deal of developmental stages and we will be working together with you to lay the foundation of education and social/emotional skills for your child. With the trusting and open relationship between BCMS and home we will work together to teach your child what is expected of them and how to make good choices. Your child will learn to respect and trust our staff who will keep your child safe, secure, and therefore able to thrive and learn.

At BCMS we have two amazing and very supportive ladies in the office, **Jill Walsh** and **Emma Padilla**, whose job it is to act as BCMS liaisons between the parents/guardians and the staff and to keep information flowing between school and home, and home and school. They are happy to assist you at any time.

There are several ways to communicate with us in the office:

- Via e-mail at: bigcityschool@gmail.com
- Via messaging on your brightwheel App
- Via phone: 415.648.5777
- A quick talk after drop off, or before pick up.

Notes

At BCMS one of the ways we communicate with you about activities and behavior during your child's day is via your child's brightwheel activity feed and brightwheel messaging. If we need your help with a behavior, we will type a brief note in brightwheel and send it to you. The note is supposed to represent you having a "crystal ball" - knowing everything that happens at school, even though you are not here. You will know if your child has been making good choices at school, was someone putting their hands on others today? how were their interactions with teachers and/or classmates and a request for your help coaching at home, etc.

When a child gets hurt at school (falls down, scrapes a knee, has a cut) we will communicate this via brightwheel as well. We want you to know when and how it happened. If it is a serious injury, we will call you at your provided contact numbers and inform you of the situation / ask you to come and pick up your child. If it is an emergency, we will call you and 911.

Behavioral notes are generally short and will have only the basic facts of what happened, who was involved, how it was dealt with here at school and asking for your help to address the undesired behavior at home with your child. All this information is to keep you informed and give you an idea of what your child needs to work on. Notes are intended only for the parents/guardians to read, and therefore it's best not to tell your child they got a note.

Many parents are surprised, and perhaps even a little mortified, when they receive a note informing them of misbehavior at school. However, at BCMS **we look upon behavior notes as a learning opportunity!** Young children are growing, developing, trying new things, imitating classmates, testing, and finding their way in the world. They are no longer babies, - they are much more aware, are being confronted with new challenges, and it is normal (and frankly expected) that children of this age group will try to test boundaries and of course make mistakes. Our goal is not to make you or your child feel bad about the incident. **In our eyes, the child is never “bad” in themselves. It is their behavior that is undesirable.** It is important that we keep you informed of what your child is working on here at school, and our goal is that school and home work together to teach your child where the boundaries are, what is expected, and how to be in the world. This is part of your child’s early childhood education. Notes are merely the vehicle we use to provide you with the basic information of events, and look for patterns of behaviors that are not being resolved, so we may teach your child together.

Sometimes, when all our discipline strategies for your child are losing their effectiveness, you may receive notes for several days, or weeks, in a row. By sharing this information with you we become a united front and together we will teach your child to follow the BCMS boundaries and respect our discipline while they are in our care.

Discipline (teaching) is so important for your child, and in fact is necessary for their sense of security, their safety, their self-esteem, and ultimately their future success in life.

When you receive a note from us, we feel it is better *not* to inform your child they have a “note” that day. Rather, use the information as if you know all that goes on in your child's life - it's your “crystal ball”.

Please feel free to talk to the office if you have any questions that we may assist you with regarding the contents of notes. We are always available to assist you and support you. Miss Amanda or Miss Jill are good resources if you need some parenting or discipline tips, new strategies, or are not sure what to do with the information we have provided to you.

Cooperative Learning - Helping Your Child Succeed

A Montessori education involves cooperation and communication between school and home. Harmony between the two is very important. Parents can build language at home. **Frequent book reading by parents relates strongly to school readiness.** Children, whose parents read to them on a regular basis, beginning early in childhood, have a higher likelihood of acquiring age-appropriate language skills.

BCMS children and parents can participate in Book Tree, a fee-based, monthly service that delivers a variety of age-appropriate books in a high-quality canvas bag - directly to BCMS for you to pick up. For more information, please visit their website at: <http://www.booktree.us/>

Here are a few tips that may help your home be a Montessori home, which fosters independence and self-confidence for your child:

- **Read to your child:** Ask simple questions about the story. Ask the child to retell, pantomime the act or repeat the sequence.

- **Play games with your child:** Talk about the rules that need to be followed and listen to directions.
- **Build an understanding of number concepts:** Practice counting objects. Recognize symbols (1, 2, and 3).
- **Understanding time and space:** Talk to your child about today, tomorrow, yesterday. Use words like: more and less, bigger and smaller, before and after.
- **Develop memory:** Memorize nursery rhymes and short poems. Tell a simple story. Remember correct sequence of events.
- **Help notice details:** Play games that involve picking out differences between objects that are very much alike. Use objects like buttons, money, cards, etc. “Find the ones that are similar and dissimilar.”
- **Learn to sort objects by characteristics:** Practice sorting objects by size, color, shape, function or material.
- **Build vocabulary:** Help your child learn the names of objects in your home, in specific rooms, in closets, in drawers. Talk about words and explain what they mean. Play games that describe characteristics to which the child must supply a name: I’m thinking of a long metal object, used in the kitchen, which we use to cut food. What is it?
- **Learn the colors:** Call attention to the colors of objects. Help your child point to colors when you name them and name them when you point to them.
- **Increase his general store of information:** Talk to your child about experiences he has had; an excursion to the park, a movie you watched together, a walk. All can be an opportunity to increase his knowledge about the world he lives in.
- **Help you child use his imagination:** Encourage inventive games that involve pretending: playing house, or store or school; being an imaginary hero - all of these games help develop your child’s critical thinking skills.

Discipline at BCMS

BCMS approaches difficult or inappropriate behavior as teaching moments. Our teachers take time to train their students about school routines and how we behave and participate at school and “make good choices.” They also teach the children about respect and responsibility. We want our students to take care in how they treat each other and the materials they use at school.

Our response to disciplinary challenges:

Verbal Interaction – The teacher uses words to help the child know what to do. The teacher may correct, instruct, teach, or assist the child in working out the problem. He/she may simply remind the child about what is expected.

Redirection/Removal – The teacher may change the activity or ask the child to get involved in something else / play with someone else. The teacher may remove the object causing distress.

Natural Consequence – The teacher may have the child experience the natural consequence of what has happened. The child may “fix it” by cleaning up the mess, picking up the toys, or apologizing to their classmate.

Thinking Time (Time Out) – The child may miss the current activity or some recess time to sit for some “thinking time” and think about making good choices at school, and then be returned to the environment to try again. Thinking time will occur on the spot (i.e.: in the classroom, on the bench on the playground, etc.). When a child is not able to complete a thinking time on the spot, or has had several time outs for the same behavior, they will be brought to the school office for a chat with a Director, and a note will be sent to you to ask for your support in correcting the behavior.

Call the Parent – If the behavior problem is repeatedly interrupting the class, or if the incident was sufficiently severe, the child will be referred to the Director (or Co-Director) and they will call a parent to discuss the situation accordingly.

Sent Home for the Day – In certain circumstances we may ask the parent to come and retrieve their child from school for the day. This usually happens when a child is being constantly disruptive to gain negative attention and is disturbing the environment for the teachers and/or students, or a child who acts dangerously towards himself, a teacher or another student.

Conference/Behavior Plan – In persistent cases we will schedule a conference with the parents/teacher/director and make a behavior plan to work on the issues.

Removal from School – In rare cases when the child’s behavior does not improve and is affecting the class atmosphere, the safety of other children, or is seen as a sign that our program has become too stressful for the child and is not meeting their needs - Big City Montessori School reserves the right to remove the child from school.

Again, many parents are surprised, and perhaps even a little mortified, when they receive a note informing them of misbehavior at school. However, at BCMS **we look upon behavior notes as a learning opportunity.** Young children are growing, developing, trying new things, imitating classmates, testing, and finding their way in the world. They are no longer babies, are much more aware, and it is normal (and frankly somewhat expected) that children of this age group will try to test boundaries and of course make mistakes. Our goal is not to make you or your child feel bad. In our eyes, no child is ever “bad” in themselves. It is their *behavior* that is undesirable. **Our goal is to teach your child - so they will internalize what they have learned through being shown boundaries, correction, and reflection - and ultimately, over time, self-regulate undesirable behavior themselves.**

It is important that we keep you informed of what your child is working on here at school, and that school and home work together to teach your child where the boundaries are, what is expected, and how to be in the world. This is part of your child’s early childhood education. We regularly look to parents for assistance - as you are the biggest influence in your child’s life! Together we can help your child learn to make good choices and to listen to all of us.

Potty Training

One of the most exciting milestones for many parents of preschoolers is when a child transitions out of wearing diapers. But how do you know when your child is ready to start transitioning? There are, of course, many philosophies about how to approach potty training, but we feel that **a child's readiness is probably the most important factor in an efficient, successful and happy potty-training process.** At BCMS, we are committed to supporting you and your child through this process, and determining a child's readiness is the first step.

If you've started thinking about potty training your child, **please read our “BCMS Potty Training Guidelines & Policy”.** You can find it posted on our website “Resources” page. It has all the information you need to help you assess signs of readiness in your child and how potty training works at home and school.

BEFORE beginning potty training at school (i.e. **BEFORE** bringing your child to school in underwear) please make an appointment to briefly talk with the Director / Office about your current progress at home, how potty training at school is different from home, to review BCMS's potty training policy together, and ask any questions you may have regarding potty training.

Staying Healthy and Well

Immunization Requirements

California School Immunization Law requires that children receive a series of immunizations before entry to schools, child care centers, or family child care homes. In addition, the California School Immunization Law requires schools, child care centers, and family child care homes to enforce immunization requirements, to maintain immunization records of all children enrolled, and to submit reports to the health department.

You can find a full listing of **CALIFORNIA IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS FOR CHILD CARE** at: [Parents' Guide to Immunizations Required for Child Care](#)

Be sure to check with your child's physician to make sure your child's immunizations are up to date - prior to entering school. In addition, **your child's physician will need to fill out and sign form LIC701 and we must have it in your child's file no later than one week before your child begins school at BCMS.**

Immunization Exemption

As of January 1, 2016 CA Senate Bill 277 is in effect - A personal beliefs exemption is no longer an option for entry into child care; however, a valid personal beliefs exemption filed with a child-care facility *before* January 1, 2016 is valid until entry into the next grade span (transitional kindergarten through 6th grade) and may be transferred between child-care facilities in California.

If a licensed physician determines a vaccine should not be given to your child because of medical reasons, a parent or guardian must submit a written statement from a licensed physician (M.D. or D.O.) which states:

- That the physical condition or medical circumstances of the child are such that the required immunization(s) is not indicated.
- Which vaccines are being exempted.
- Whether the medical exemption is permanent or temporary.
- The expiration date, if the exemption is temporary.

Please inform the BCMS office immediately if you have:

- **A physician's medical exemption for your child.**
- **A personal beliefs exemption filed before January 1, 2016 with a previous child-care facility.**

For complete details and info about CA immunizations, visit: ShotsforSchool.org

BCMS General Illness Policies (NON-COVID)

BCMS is not equipped to provide care for children who are too sick to participate in regularly scheduled activities at school. Therefore, it is very important for you to make back up arrangements for substitute care in the event your child is/or becomes ill. The following criteria are outlined to assist you in deciding when not to bring your child to school because of illness.

Your child may not come to school today if he/she:

- Has or had a fever during the 24 hours preceding attendance at the school.
- Has vomited during the 24 hours preceding attendance at the school.
- Has diarrhea during the 24 hours preceding attendance at the school.
- Has skin sores which are open and draining (including such things as impetigo, etc.). Your child may return to school when the drainage ceases, the sores begin to heal, or your physician clears your child to return to school.
- Has ear/eye drainage such as pink eye (conjunctivitis). Your child may return to school after prescription medication has been administered for 24 hours.
- Has Streptococcal Group A throat infection. Your child may return to school after prescription medication has been administered for 24 hours.
- Has a contagious disease, such as Chicken Pox (until the child is cleared by a doctor/is no longer contagious/until the lesions are crusted over).
- Has lice, ringworm, or scabies that is untreated and contagious to others.
- Has undiagnosed rash or a rash attributable to contagious illness or condition.
- Has significant respiratory problems.
- In some cases, a note from your child's physician may be required.

When doubtful about your child's health condition, play it safe for the sake of your child, other children, and the staff at BCMS - keep them home. Especially keep your child home for 48 hours in the case of a severe cold, upper respiratory infection, or if your child has an infectious disease.

Any child who becomes ill while at school will be quarantined in the school office, until a parent/authorized adult arrives to pick up the child. The administrative staff will notify you and ask you to pick up your child immediately if your child:

- Has a fever of 100F, or higher.
- Vomits during the day.
- Is fussy, lethargic, or constantly crying for an unusual amount of time/for unexplained reasons.
- Has two diarrhea episodes in the same day.
- Has any contagious drainage or weeping sores, which includes suspicion of such things as chicken pox, impetigo, pink eye, or ear drainage.
- Unknown rash, severe sore throat, severe cough, unexplained pain.
- Children who are too sick to participate in regularly scheduled activities at school and require more care than the program staff can provide without compromising the health and safety of the other children

When your child is sent home due to illness, we will complete an illness notification form for you to adhere to. We require you to keep your child home for at least 24 hours from the date and time of the notification.

Your child must stay home and be symptom and fever free for a 24-hour period before returning to school.

We strongly encourage you NOT to bring your child(ren) who are ill, and seem symptom free, due to use of over-the-counter medication (such as Children's Tylenol, Motrin and cold & cough syrup, etc.). These over-the-counter medications typically only mask the symptoms for short periods of time rather than cure the illness, and we end up having to call you to pick up your child in any case.

When your child is sick, be sure to call, e-mail or brightwheel message the office to let the Administrative Staff know that your child is out sick and what symptoms they may be having. We try to keep track of what illnesses are going around in our school, so we can keep everyone informed. Your help with this is greatly appreciated.

BCMS Head Lice Policy

Big City has a **No Nits** policy. **If a child has a case of head lice, he or she will not be allowed back to school until a thorough check has been done by a BCMS staff member and no live lice or nits can be found.** Children will be checked in the morning when they are being dropped off at school. **You must bring your child after 8:30 a.m. to be checked by our Co-Director, Miss Hilma.**

We understand that this can be inconvenient. But please remember, this policy is in place to protect ALL the children at school.

Head Lice Information

Head lice (*Pediculus capitis*) are small parasitic insects exquisitely adapted to living mainly on the scalp and neck hairs of their human host. Their six impressive legs are elegantly evolved to grasp hair shafts and provide a striking example of biological specialization. Long associated with people, head lice have been recovered from prehistoric mummies. Head lice are equal opportunity parasites; they do not respect socio-economic class distinctions. Their presence does not connote a lack of hygiene or sanitation practiced by their host. Head lice are mainly acquired by direct head-to-head contact with an infested person's hair, but may infrequently be transferred with shared combs, hats and other hair accessories. They may also remain on bedding or upholstered furniture for a brief period. In North America and Europe, children are more frequently infested than are adults, and Caucasians more frequently than other ethnic groups. Neither able to fly nor jump, lice are also unlikely to wander far from their preferred habitat. Lice and their eggs are unable to burrow into the scalp.

Head lice derive nutrient by blood-feeding once or more often each day, and cannot survive for more than a day or so at room temperature without ready access to a person's blood. A nymphal louse hatches from its egg after about 8 days of development, and begins to feed, grow and develop until it attains the adult stage about 9-12 days after hatching. The typical life cycle of a head louse is three weeks. A female louse may deposit more than 100 eggs at a rate of about six eggs each day. Only those eggs deposited by inseminated female lice will hatch. Generally, an infested person has fewer than a dozen active lice on the scalp at any time, but may have hundreds of viable, dead, and hatched eggs.

Make sure to follow the policies we have listed above and any future updates – our goal is to keep everyone as healthy as possible. We appreciate everyone's help in stopping the spread of illnesses in our school!

Medicine at School

BCMS can only give prescription medication to your child. We require the original bottle with the pharmacy label.

You must fill out our Medication Consent form and complete it with your signature to give us permission to administer the medication.

Without this form filled out correctly, we cannot administer any medication. Please stop by the office to complete the form and give medication bottle to the office staff when you drop off your child. If your child needs medication on a regular basis, please indicate this on your school forms and inform the Director.

BCMS can NOT administer any over the counter medications to your child - such as cough medicine, pain reliever/fever reducer, cough drops, etc. (Unless prescribed, in writing, by a doctor for a specific medical condition.)

COVID-19 Health & Safety

Big City Montessori School remains committed to taking actions that protect the health, safety, and welfare of every person in our BCMS community. Every child care program is expected to continue to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and to ensure the safety of children, staff, and families in their care.

As you may know, guidance has been updated numerous times for COVID-19 infection control practices in childcares. BCMS will continue to monitor COVID-19 requirements and guidance in all applicable California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and Community Care Licensing (CCL) Provider Information Notices (PIN), in addition to guidance or requirements from California Department of Public Health (CDPH), California Department of Industrial Relations Division of Occupational Safety & Health (Cal/OSHA), and San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH).

There may be differing recommendations between the most current CDC, CDPH, CCL, Cal/OSHA, and SFDPH guidance. BCMS will continue to review and carefully consider any updated guidance, and BCMS reserves the right to apply new and / or above recommended guidance - or not - to our specific BCMS policies and requirements if / when we (BCMS) deem necessary to address the need for continued infection control in our specific BCMS school setting.

BCMS REQUIRES that all staff / parents / guardians follow all BCMS specific protocols and requirements listed in our BCMS COVID-19 HEALTH & SAFETY PROTOCOLS document.

The most current version of the document is available 24/7 on our website [COVID-19 TAB](#)

Parent Support

We welcome you to drop by, call, e-mail or brightwheel message the office at any time - to communicate with us, ask questions, pick up parenting tips, or share details or insights about your child with us. The Director will set up private meetings for parents who want more than a quick chat. **We support you 100% and are ready, willing and able to support you whenever needed/requested.** We also have many options in place that are available to support you:

Parent/Teacher Conferences

In Montessori education, there are no “report cards” – grading, judgment, or categorization of a child’s progress. Each child is exposed to a multitude of subjects and experiences and is allowed to progress at their own pace, and build a love of learning by exploring and absorbing whatever they are interested in at the time. Their interests and fascinations can change from moment to moment, and day to day. Each child progresses at their own pace and all children are therefore always age appropriate in their own personal progress. There is no right or wrong in their personal journey/progress.

Please be assured that if there is *ever* a concern about your child, their progress, or any issue, we will contact you immediately to meet and discuss our concern so we can work together to support your child.

BCMS has an open-door policy and does not pre-set dates for parent/teacher conferences. **Parent/teacher conferences can be scheduled, upon request by either parent or teacher, at any time.** Parents can briefly chat with their Head Teacher before class starts, or just after class ends. Parents are also welcome, at any time, to approach the Directors with concerns or questions.

We respectfully request that you do not approach any of the assistant teachers for information regarding your child. Firstly, this will distract them from the important work of monitoring the children and program in session, and keeping the children safe. Secondly, they may not have the information you are seeking. It is best to go to the Head Teacher or request information through the office. They will be able to obtain the information in the most rapid and efficient manner, and are committed to providing you with answers to your questions from the right sources.

If you would like to schedule a conference with your child’s teacher, at any time, please send an e-mail request to: bigcityschool@gmail.com or stop by the office to schedule one. We will do everything possible to accommodate your scheduling needs.

BCMS Parent Seminars

We provide several free parent seminars per year to help provide tools for parenting, parent support, and information of interest to our parent community. Some examples of the seminars we offer: Montessori Method & Curriculum Seminar and Discipline Tools Seminar.

Other ways we can help:

- You can schedule a talk with Miss Amanda, Miss Jill or your Head Teacher to support your parenting needs at any time.
- After drop-off or before pick-up, pull Miss Amanda aside and have a brief chat in the front hall.
- Email or stop by the school office for a chat with Miss Jill or Miss Emma.
- Lookout for the weekly Director's Letter replete with parenting tips.

Big City Parents Organization (BCPO)

The BCPO is an all-parent volunteer organization. **The group plans the fabulous annual Scholarship Gala event for the BCMS community, which is the one and only means of fundraising by the BCPO.** The event features gourmet food and wine, live entertainment, a silent and live auction, and is the single, annual opportunity for parents to socialize on their own. 100% of funds raised from this adult-only event are used for scholarships to provide tuition assistance for five children to attend BCMS.

For more information about the BCPO, the annual Scholarship Gala, and ways you can get involved, please visit our website "BCPO" page at:

<http://www.bigcitymontessorischool.com/aboutbcpo/>

Disaster Preparedness

We want to reassure you that BCMS is prepared for an emergency in many ways:

Fire

BCMS conducts a full fire drill every three months. We sound the alarm and all children and staff are timed to see how long it takes the entire population to exit the building. Depending on where population is located, we exit either through the back door to the playground, or the front entrance to the lobby. Our record exit time is 36 seconds! (Our longest time is 1 minute 10 seconds). We have smoke detectors in every room and fire extinguishers in the kitchen, front hall, and play room.

In the event of an emergency, that would require us to leave the school site, our plan of action is to take the children to an off-site central location. The designated central location is **Lowes at 491 Bayshore Boulevard, San Francisco - [\(415\) 486-8611](tel:4154868611)**, just one block away (back entrance on Loomis St.).

The School Director / Amanda Riccetti's cell phone number is (415) 850-7006.

Our Director and Co-Director, as well as all other head staff are first aid and CPR certified every two years.

Earthquake

Our building is built on bedrock, we have safety glass in all our windows, and light fixtures are secured to beams. Due to the nature of our preschool setting (materials are on low shelves/tables) the risk of things falling from a high level is much lower than most. In the rare event we would need to keep the children here on site (for example, overnight), we couldn't be better prepared. We have cots, mats, blankets, and pillows, lots of bottled water, food and activities to keep the children busy. Not to mention a caring staff that your child is familiar with. If communications are down (phone, cell, internet) we would keep the children safe here with us until you are able to arrive.

In Closing

This handbook was written to give you all of the information that you need to help guide you and your child in your journey here at BCMS. Once again, welcome to the BCMS community. We look forward to having you and your child learn and grow with us!

Yours in Education,

Amanda Riccetti

Director