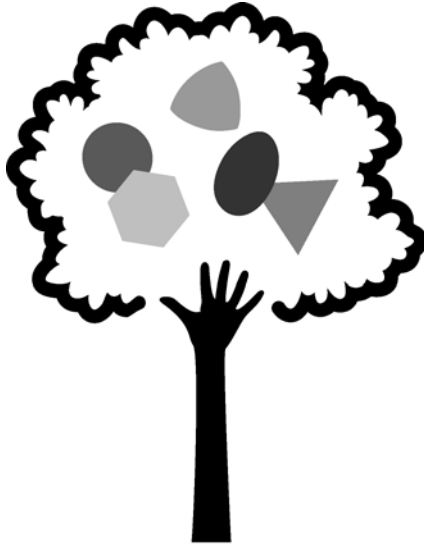


# Parent Handbook

## 2009-10



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## **Section 1: Introduction**

The Vincent S. Mastro Montessori Academy welcomes you and your child. The purpose of this handbook is to introduce parents to the Montessori approach and to inform parents of the policies, procedures and practices of the academy. Please consult the handbook throughout the year as questions arise.

### **The Montessori Approach**

The Montessori approach is based on the conviction that the ages from birth to six-years-old are the most important for forming the character and for learning. Young children have what Dr. Maria Montessori called an “absorbent mind.” Children are not forced to learn in Montessori. They work willingly and happily because they enjoy what they are doing. Many observers are quite amazed at the capabilities of such young children. It is our aim to provide the best environment for children to develop these abilities.

The Montessori primary classroom is a mixed-age, child-oriented community that encompasses the preschool and kindergarten years. The Montessori classroom is also a prepared environment that is designed to facilitate maximum independent learning and exploration by the child. The classroom is divided into four distinct areas: practical life, sensorial, mathematics, and language. By carrying out practical life exercises, the children learn care of person, care of the environment, development of social relations, and coordination.

In the sensorial area, the children discover the world through the development of their senses. As they learn to judge different sizes, shapes, colors, sounds, and texture, the children are also developing a foundation for language and mathematics. As the children progress, they move from the spoken to the written word in language and from the concrete to the abstract in mathematical operations.

After turning five, children are expected to attend for a full day. The extended day for 5- to 6-year-old children is a vital part of the Montessori experience. As the children assume the extended day, they are getting ready for spontaneous activity in reading, writing, and math. This is the year when the child begins to unfold as a young leader, a beginning reader and a budding mathematician. If the child is withdrawn from Montessori before the year of fruition, parents or guardians will probably lose the best return on their investment in early childhood education.

The administration feels so strongly about the need to complete the three-year cycle that it reserves the right to refuse to admit the younger siblings of children who have been withdrawn prematurely.

When a child transfers to a public school, it is the policy of the academy to adhere to the cut-off date of the school district to the benefit of the child. The administration strongly discourages parents from attempting to use their child's Montessori experience to circumvent the cut-off date of their local district.

To learn more about the Montessori philosophy, parents are welcome to ask the staff to recommend additional reading.

## **The Approach to Discipline**

It is the policy of the Vincent S. Mastro Montessori Academy to adhere to the Montessori approach to discipline. This approach alleviates many of the discipline problems that might be present in another kind of environment.

The development of self-discipline is integral to the Montessori methodology. Children are given a great deal of responsibility for their behavior and education. They are taught ground rules and are expected to follow them.

The classroom is organized in an orderly, logical manner that is designed to foster concentration, focus, and independent learning, and to minimize interruption and contention. Children choose work that they are capable of doing. They are free to continue that work for as long as they wish, without interference from others. The mixed-age group allows the younger children to emulate the more mature behavior of the older children.

Through quiet discussion and active listening, children are given an opportunity to express and define their feelings. Children are respected and harsh words and sudden reprimands are avoided by all staff.

When a child appears to be out of control, that child is directed to an activity that can challenge him or her. If necessary, the child takes time out from work and joins the teacher until he or she feels sufficient control to return to the activities. Other important related goals are self-motivation, independence, respect for the rights of others, cooperation, courtesy, coordination, control of movement and love of order.

## **Certification**

All of our Teachers are either certified by the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) or are teachers-in-training with AMI. AMI was established by Dr. Maria Montessori in 1929 and was guided for more than 50 years by her son and close collaborator, Mario Montessori. It is presently directed by an international board and supported by distinguished scholars throughout the world. AMI is the reliable authority on authentic Montessori theory and practice; and since its inception, it has been the coordinating agency for growth and development of Montessori education.

Training with the Association Montessori Internationale consists of nine months of full-time postgraduate training at a certified teacher-training institute. AMI issues diplomas for primary (ages 3 to 6) and elementary (ages 6 to 12) teaching. The curricula for both courses include comprehensive lectures on Montessori theory and practice, demonstrations of and practice with instructional material, preparation of teaching albums, classroom observation, and supervised practice teaching.

In the primary course, content includes practical life exercises, sensorial foundations for mathematics, language training, writing and reading, reading analysis, and fundamentals of grammar and syntax, as well as history, biology, science, music, and art.

The elementary training course includes study in the areas of biology, geography, history, language, mathematics, science, and music. For both the primary and elementary diplomas, passing grades are required on written and oral examinations conducted by examiners of AMI.

## **Section 2: Policy & Procedures**

Our school year generally begins phasing in the Tuesday after Labor Day and ends the first week of June. New children are oriented to the classroom routine in small groups, phased in over a period of one to two weeks depending on the number of new children. A schedule for the phase-in period is listed in the school calendar included with your registration forms. Consult the school calendar for your child's specific start date.

Our week runs from Monday through Friday. Half-day session hours are from 8:30 AM to 11:30 AM. Full-day session hours are from 8:30 AM to 3:30 PM. Drop-off begins at 8:20 AM; pickup begins at 11:20 AM for the half-day session and at 3:20 PM for the full-day session.

### **Clothing**

The most suitable attire for school is play clothing that is safe, comfortable and easy for the child to manage. Avoid toggle buttons, faulty zippers, and overalls that button at the shoulders. If your child is recently toilet-trained, clothes that are easy for the child to manage such as pants with elastic waistbands are a necessity.

For primary-age children, please provide a complete change of clothing in a shoebox at the beginning of the school year in the event your child needs fresh clothes. If soiled clothing is sent home with your child, please replace the clothing the next day. Also, if your child is sent home

in clothing from the school out of necessity, please wash and return the clothing.

All clothing should be marked with your child's name. Label all outer garments including hats, gloves, scarves, boots, and rain wear. Any clothing not claimed at the end of the school year will be donated to charity.

Please do not allow your child to wear gadgets in their clothing to school. For example, sneakers that emit lights or sounds or sweatshirts that encompass movable or floating objects are a distraction, and interrupt the children's concentration and focus. Please limit such clothing to after school.

Sneakers and laced shoes are the most appropriate footwear because they are sturdy and the foot is completely protected. While appealing in warm weather, sandals and open-toe shoes are unsafe for ball playing, climbing and gardening. Children who are wearing sandals will not be permitted to take part in certain activities.

The children shall be taken out daily when weather conditions do not pose a significant health risk. A significant health risk exists when the wind chill is at or below 15 degrees F or the heat index is at or above 90 degrees F.

Children should be dressed properly for outdoors. Rain coats and hats are appropriate for inclement weather but umbrellas are obviously hazardous and should be left at home. During the winter, children do go out in the snow if they bring a winter coat, snow pants, a hat, gloves, and boots. Boots must be large enough for the child to manage by himself.

Children are allowed to dress up although their activities may be restricted for the day. While items of special interest to the whole class are welcome, children should not be allowed to wear jewelry to school, valuable or not. The school is not responsible for lost valuables. Also, children should not bring toys, games, money, candy, or chewing gum. Your carpool driver will also appreciate your firmness at home.

## Separation

Some children, especially those who are coming to school for the first time, may cry the first few days. Our staff has found from experience that a quick separation works best. Children who cry on arrival usually stop shortly after the parent leaves and our teachers have been trained to handle such situations.

If your child cries when you arrive at school, please say a quick good-bye, remind your child that you will be back to get him later, and *leave*. Please do *not* linger and try to persuade your child to stop crying or reason or argue with him. Maintain a cheerful, positive attitude about school and just leave after saying good-bye. If you find that you are still worried after you have returned home or arrived at work, feel free to call the office for an update.

## **Transportation**

Transportation is arranged by the parents. For parents who wish to form carpools, parent directories are included in this handbook and are also available from the office.

### **Arrivals and Dismissals**

Parents should inform all those responsible for driving their child of the drop-off procedure. All drivers should observe the following rules for arrivals and dismissals.

1. Facing the front of the building, enter the right-hand driveway and exit from the left-hand driveway.
2. When dropping off your child, drive to the entrance of the fire lane. Please do not get out of your car. Children will be taken from the car by an assistant. At the front door, messages that you want transmitted to staff members must be given in writing.
3. When picking up your child, drive around the circle and park as close to the exit driveway curb as possible. By pulling all the way around, you will help to avoid traffic tie-ups in the street. Walk to the front step and wait for your child to be dismissed by an assistant. Please walk your child hand-in-hand to your car.
4. Please do not enter or exit the school driveway while using a cell phone.
5. Be prompt in driving away in order to avoid blocking traffic. Please do not inconvenience others by socializing in the parking lot at this time.

Doors open at 8:20 AM and dismissals begin promptly at 11:20 AM for the half-day session and at 3:20 PM for the full-day session. If you are late for an arrival or a dismissal, please use the side door and sign in with the office.

## **Change in Pick-up Routine**

It is imperative that parents inform the office whenever there is a change in a child's pick-up routine. The procedure applies regardless of whether the person picking up is another parent, or is listed with the office as an authorized driver. Parents should send a note with the child or telephone the office. An affirmation from the parent or person picking up your child -- and certainly not from the child -- is not sufficient. The staff must have the parent's permission to release the child. When a conflict arises, the office will attempt to contact the parent in order to confirm a change.

**HOWEVER, THE CHILD WILL NOT BE RELEASED UNTIL THE PARENT CAN BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO VERIFY THE CHANGE.**

If a non-custodial parent has been denied access or granted limited access to the child by court order, the custodial parent must submit a copy of the court order to the office. Otherwise, the child will be released to both parents. A strict dismissal procedure is necessary for the safety of all of our children. The cooperation of each and every parent is essential.

## **Application for Private School Transportation**

Depending upon the requirements established by the school district in which they reside, parents or guardians of children in kindergarten through grade 12 in private schools may be entitled to aid in lieu of transportation. Parents of children of kindergarten age and up will receive an Application For Private School Transportation from the academy prior to March 1, preceding the school year in which transportation is requested. Parents should complete the application upon receipt and return it to the academy

before March 15. The public school should notify the parent or guardian and the private school as to the determination of the application within 15 days of receipt from the private school or August 1, whichever is later.

## **Attendance**

Children progress more steadily and retain more with continuous five-day weeks. Lateness interrupts the work cycle and frequent absences inhibit retention. On the other hand, when your child shows signs of illness, please consider the effect of contagion. Consult the health section of this booklet for guidance.

When your child is unable to attend school, please notify the school office before 9:00 AM and state the reason for the child's absence.

## **Lunch & Snacks**

All children staying for lunch, daily or occasionally, are asked to bring their lunch and beverage in a basket. The basket should be able to hold lunch, a cloth napkin and place mat, silverware, a glass, and a bowl if needed. Lunch plates will be provided in the classroom.

All baskets should have the name of the child on the side or bottom. A ribbon with the child's name would be an added touch. Have fun with your child picking out the basket and letting your child pack lunch daily. It may take a few extra minutes each morning but it can be a special time together.

Lunch is conducted as a practical life activity. The children set the tables, arrange their food at their places, and sing a song of thanksgiving when all are ready.

Please send nutritious food in an amount that can be eaten in one sitting. Remember, children of this age have small stomachs. One small fruit is a nutritious dessert. Avoid snack foods. No candy, please. Any food not eaten will be returned in the lunch box, so you are aware of how much your child has eaten. As a rule, trading or sharing of lunches is not allowed.

A light snack is served mid-morning. It usually consists of unsalted pretzels and organic apple juice. Several times a year, parents are asked to send in produce with their child for the class. The carrots, bananas, and other produce are used in a practical life exercise of peeling, cutting, and serving. These are also served at snack time.

## **Celebrations**

Major holidays are celebrated by marking their historical significance. Celebrations are kept to a minimum in order to avoid interrupting the work cycle. A minor change in routine, such as decorative napkins, adequately signifies a special event for a child.

This practice applies to birthday celebrations as well. Each child's birthday is recognized at school with a song and a candle for the child to extinguish. Parents may send in snacks for their child's celebration, as long as one is provided for each child in the class. Keep in mind that cupcakes and cakes are too difficult and messy for our younger children to handle. Appropriate snacks are fruit, small muffins, and freshly baked breads. Please call the school beforehand if you are planning to send a snack for a birthday or any event.

Party invitations, greeting cards and valentines cannot be delivered through the school. Your cooperation in this matter is appreciated.

## **Extra Hours**

For the convenience of our parents, children may arrive as early as 8:00 AM. Half-day children may stay for lunch and beyond based on their readiness and availability by prior arrangement with the office. Twenty-four hours notice is appreciated whenever possible. Half-day children who will be staying after lunch should bring a sleeping bag or blanket for a mandatory rest period. The children who are staying extra hours should be signed in and out at the side door.

The fee is fifteen dollars per hour or part thereof. The fee is not prorated. Payment should be made daily or no later than the end of the week if the child stays more than one day each week.

Payment should be made in an envelope with the date, the child's name, the extra hours, and the amount enclosed written on the envelope. Your prompt payment will eliminate the substantial record keeping that is required for delinquent accounts and monthly invoicing.

Extended hours start on Monday, September 14, 2009 and end on Thursday June 3, 2010.

## **Late Fees**

There is a charge for all children picked up late at dismissal. For the half-day session, a late fee of \$15.00 will be charged per hour or part thereof for all children

picked up after 11:40 AM. For the full-day session, a late fee of \$1.00 per minute will be charged for all children picked up after 3:45 PM.

## **School Closings**

Announcements regarding snow closings and other weather emergencies will be recorded on the regular school telephone number. However, to avoid overloading the phone line, we encourage parents to listen to the radio for our announcement first. School closings are announced over WKXW 101.5 FM. Closings are also listed on the screen of News Jersey Channel 12 and at [www.News12.com](http://www.News12.com) and [www.nj1015.com](http://www.nj1015.com).

## **Section 3: Parent Responsibilities**

The policies and procedures of the Academy are reviewed with both prospective and returning parents on Back-to-School Night, which all parents are expected to attend. If you have any questions or need more information, please set up an appointment with the Director.

### **Parent Education**

Parent education is very important aspect of the Montessori approach. To enlighten our parents, parent education sessions are held throughout the school year. Because it is important that the Montessori approach be reinforced at home, parents are expected to attend these sessions as part of their child's education. Parents are also strongly encouraged to attend parent-teacher conferences, to schedule observations, and to otherwise participate in school activities.

### **At Home**

At home, the child should be allowed to observe and participate in their parents' activities at the kitchen sink or garage workbench. An appropriate step stool enables the child to have access to the adult's world, and the parent has only to slow his pace and expectations for the child to join in.

Parents may want to arrange the home so that they help the child master his environment and become increasingly independent of the parents' help. The child's room should

be simple and orderly. Everything in it should be appropriate for the size and ability of the child. For example, provide low shelves with a few well-chosen toys, a low table with brush and comb, a mirror, and low hooks for hanging clothes. Clothes should be chosen for the ease in which the child can get in and out of them.

An overabundance of toys and many hours of television rob the child of his or her opportunity for accomplishment, and create an unnatural passivity and apathy toward life.

The academy discourages and by no means endorses play dates among students. Each day in the Montessori classroom, the children are given sufficient opportunity to develop their social skills and a sense of community with their classmates. After school, the children should be allowed to occupy themselves with play and to develop their role in the family by interacting with their siblings and family friends under the supervision of their parents.

The Montessori directress is trained to solicit and reinforce self-discipline in an environment that develops mature behavior over time. Children may interact quite differently outside of the school environment, and disputes may develop that remain unresolved and carry over into the classroom. While the directress will attempt to assist the children with resolving disputes in the classroom, the academy disclaims any responsibility for behavior or incidents that may occur outside of school.

## **Parent–Teacher Conferences**

Instead of written reports, parent-teacher conferences are scheduled during the year. Conferences are scheduled both in the spring and in the fall. You may request additional conferences with your child’s teacher at any time during the school year. Make appointments through the office.

## **Observations**

Formal observations are by appointment only and must be scheduled through the office. In-class observations can be scheduled from November 1 to May 1. Observations through the mirror windows can be scheduled for the downstairs primary classroom and the elementary classroom after October 1.

In-class observations are especially valuable when done in conjunction with a parent–teacher conference. Such observations are suggested for the second- and third-year primary student. In order to minimize disruption and to conduct an effective in-class observation, please read the enclosed guidelines prior to your visit. You may also want to prepare your child for your visit ahead of time.

## Participation

Parents are welcome to participate in their child's Montessori experience to whichever extent they are willing and available.

At the time of enrollment, parents sign a program partnership agreement in which they make a commitment to partner with the staff in their child's Montessori education, and it is expected that all parents will participate in a least one parent-teacher conference each semester, observe their child in the classroom at least once a year, and that at least one parent will attend each parent education session.

Beyond this initial level of commitment, other ways in which parents can become more involved are:

- sharing their hobbies and interest with the children;
- volunteering to listen to children read aloud in the classroom;
- assisting the staff with classroom activities such as gardening, teas, and plays;
- supervising children on trips to the library and other excursions;
- organizing family events such as the harvest picnic or international day.

Annually, the administration seeks volunteers to host events such as the fall cocktail party or to coordinate the spring fundraiser.

The board of trustees also welcomes parent participation on various committees such as the building, fundraising, and marketing committees.

## **Tuition**

Tuition is the sole source of income for the academy and must be paid promptly. Tuition is due in three equal installments, on the following dates: March 1, July 1, and November 1. For children new to the school, the tuition is paid up-to-date with the enrollment agreement.

Lunch and the extended day until 3:30 PM will be continued to be available for half-day children based on their readiness.

For those children whom the directress has deemed ready to make the transition to the extended day during the school year, the additional tuition will be prorated on the difference between the half-day and full-day tuition.

However, the tuition for children who transition to the extended day for only part of the week will not be prorated. Of course, parents may opt to pay the hourly rate of fifteen dollars for the extended hours in lieu of the full day tuition.

Please contact the office about any financial difficulties you may have regarding tuition payment. A child whose tuition payments are not current may be refused admission to the school.

Once a decision is made to transfer your child, please submit the name of the new school to the office. Parents will be given written evaluations for each child who completes the three-year Montessori program. The school will furnish records of each child's progress to authorized personnel when written consent is given by the parents. However, no school records will be released until all accounts are paid in full.

## Section 4: Health

Each child is required, by the state, to have a complete physical examination prior to school opening. A form to be completed by the child's physician is provided by the school.

NO CHILD CAN BE ADMITTED WITHOUT A DOCTOR'S CERTIFICATE. THIS POLICY WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED, AS MANDATED BY THE STATE.

The state also requires an accessible immunization record for each child listing specific dates for each immunization. The appropriate forms will be mailed to the parents before the beginning of the school year. At the same time, parents will be solicited about their child's medications, allergies, and dietary restrictions. However, parents should inform the office if there are any changes in their child's health status throughout the school year.

## **MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION**

Assuring the health and safety of all of our children is a team effort by the staff, the family and health care providers. This is particularly true when medication is necessary. Therefore, an understanding of all health care procedures is critical to meeting that goal.

Whenever possible, it is best for medicine to be given at home. The first dose of any medication should always be given at home with a sufficient amount of time (ideally 24 hours) before the student returns to school so that they can be observed for reactions.

Prescription medication will only be given at school with a written order by the physician along with written permission from the parents. This also includes “as needed” medications such as an EpiPen or a nebulizer treatment.

Prescription medication must have the original pharmacist’s label that includes the student’s name, the phone number of the pharmacy, the name of the doctor who prescribed the medicine, the name and the expiration date of the medicine, the date it was prescribed, and the dosage, route, frequency, and any special instructions for administration or storage.

No non-prescription medicine will be given at school unless accompanied by a doctor’s note along with written permission from the parents. Over-the-counter medication must be in its original packaging with the student’s full name on the label.

The academy reserves the right to refuse the administration of medications if all procedures are not satisfied. All medication must be brought to and from school by the parent *not* the student. No student should be given any medicine including cough drops and homeopathic medicines to take by themselves at lunchtime or to carry in their lunchbox or school bag.

Medication will be stored in the locked narcotics cabinet in the office where it is inaccessible to the children. Each time medication is dispensed, a notation will be made in the student record.

Medications given at school will be administered by staff members with health and safety training. Those staff members will be informed of the student's health needs related to that medication.

The intention of this policy is to encourage communication between the parents, the physician, and the school to assure safety in the administering of medications to the students that require them while at school.

Children with contagious symptoms, such as sore throats, sniffles, coughs, or sneezes, should be kept home. The staff will notify parents to pick up any child who develops symptoms of a cold or other illness.

The law mandates that the school shall not permit a child who has any of the illnesses, or symptoms of the illnesses, specified below to be admitted to school on a given day. In order for the child to return to school, the parents must submit a written medical diagnosis from a licensed physician. The diagnosis must indicate that the child presents no serious health risk to herself or to other children.

Such illnesses or symptoms of illness include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

- Elevated oral temperature of 101.5°F or higher
- Acute diarrhea
- Acute vomiting
- Blood in the urine
- Visibly enlarged lymph nodes
- Swollen joints
- Infected, untreated skin patches
- Weeping or bleeding skin lesions that have not been treated by a physician or nurse
- Sore throat or severe coughing
- Stiff neck
- Severe pain or discomfort
- Difficult, rapid breathing
- Yellow eyes or jaundiced skin
- Red eyes with discharge
- Skin rashes lasting more than one day

Once the child is symptom free or a licensed physician indicates that the child poses no serious health risk to herself or to other children, the child may return to school. If a child who has already been admitted to the school manifests any of the illnesses or symptoms of illness specified above, the child shall be separated from the group of well children and the parents shall be contacted to arrange for the child to be picked up from school.

## **Excludable Communicable Diseases**

The law also mandates that a child with an excludable communicable disease, as specified below, is not to be admitted to school or be allowed to remain at school. In order to return to school, the child's licensed physician must state in writing that the child has been diagnosed and presents no risk to herself or to others.

<b>RESPIRATORY ILLNESSES</b>	<b>GASTROINTESTINAL ILLNESSES</b>	<b>CONTACT ILLNESSES</b>
Chicken Pox	Giardia Lamblia	Impetigo
German Measles	Hepatitis A	Lice
Hemophilus Influenza	Salmonella	Scabies
Measles	Shigella	
Meningococcus		
Mumps		
Strep Throat		
Tuberculosis		
Whooping Cough		

The school is also mandated to notify in writing each parent whose child may have been exposed to an excludable disease during an outbreak at the school.

THE SCHOOL IS TO BE NOTIFIED BY THE PARENTS IF A CHILD HAS CONTRACTED A COMMUNICABLE DISEASE.

Lastly, children who are well enough to attend and participate in activities at school should be considered well enough to spend time out of doors when weather conditions permit. Or stated the other way, if a parent feels a child is too sick to go outside, then that child is too sick to be at school. An exception to this statement may be the case of an asthmatic child whose asthma is triggered by cold air.

## Section 5: Conclusion

Our staff welcomes the opportunity to work with you and your child in a Montessori environment. Your cooperation and conscientiousness in observing our procedures and regulations will help to ensure the health and safety of all the children.

It is the philosophy of Montessori education and the policy of the Vincent S. Mastro Montessori Academy that almost all children can benefit from the Montessori experience. The exception being children whose needs require resources beyond the capabilities of our school.

Conversely, it is our experience that Montessori education is not for all parents. Not all parents are willing or able to trust their child to progress at their own initiative and to allow the child the independence to develop according to their own needs.

If after several consultations with the staff, parents remain dissatisfied with the practices of Montessori education or the policies of the school, the parents will normally be asked to withdraw their child from the school.

When parents are requested to withdraw their child due to philosophical differences, the parents will be given the time to make alternative child care arrangements. However, if a child is a danger to himself or others, the parents will be asked to withdraw the child immediately. Parent will also be asked to withdraw their child immediately if either parent exhibits potentially dangerous behavior.

Parents will be notified via a parent-teacher conference. A written record of the conference will be placed in the child's folder.

The academy will not expel a child based solely on the child's parent making a complaint to the Bureau of Licensing regarding the academy's alleged violations of the licensing regulations or questioning the administration directly regarding policy and procedures.

Please feel free to offer any suggestions that you may have for the betterment of the school. If you need any further information, please contact the office or any staff member.

The Vincent S. Mastro Montessori Academy reserves the right to change or supplement its procedures and regulations without prior notice.