

2011-2012 PARENT HANDBOOK



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Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom

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Editor’s Note: Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom is a coeducational school, however, to avoid the use of somewhat awkward expressions, such as he/she or his/her when referring to the children, we will alternate between the masculine and feminine gender or use the plural case.

Section 1: Introduction

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom: On a Quest for Excellence

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's goal is to give its students an education that will prepare them to succeed both in college and in life in a rapidly changing world. Like all Montessori schools, Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom emphasizes hands-on discovery-based learning. The program promises to strive for an exceptional standard of excellence, students are challenged to compete against themselves, rather than each other. Our curriculum includes programs in international studies, as well as some of the strongest programs in mathematics, science, foreign language, and the arts that are being offered in education today.

At Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom, there is a commitment to a close partnership between home and school, academic accountability, and an innovative program that leads students to develop extraordinary levels of personal responsibility and motivation, self-reliance and self-esteem, self-confidence.

A school is nothing but people and beliefs. We do not believe in a method of education that leaves you the parent, as an outsider, and we cannot be successful with a family that has not made that "leap of faith" to invite us into their lives and trust. Parents and teachers working together as partners create an experience of lasting value for our children and the community.

When we talk about our dreams for the school, we believe: "There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One of these is roots, the other is wings." The roots – the skills considered basic to a fine education - are available to our children. With the support of the school's parents and the community, Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom will have the resources that will allow its children to develop wings of the spirit. In the process, these children, this school, and eventually the world are learning how to soar. In 1876, a famous Native American chief, Sitting Bull, said "Let us put our minds together, and see what kind of future we can build for our children".

What values do you and our school share?

1. Love for your child.

All of the children here are truly cared about. They spend about three years with the same classroom, so they are known and cared about for who they are. We watch and celebrate their progress over the years as you do. You have gone through a selection process to be admitted to our school. We do this to make sure that our values are aligned, and that we can truly benefit your family and child.

2. Keeping your child safe.

Can you entrust your most precious possession to us? You may have checked our systems, our location, and our personnel, possibly even talked with other parents currently enrolled. You have decided to take that "leap of faith" and entrust your child to our care. On our part, we have a saying, "It doesn't much matter what else we do for your child, unless we return him in about the same condition we got him in, maybe a little smarter and dirtier. The safety of your child is of utmost importance to us, and is monitored continuously throughout the day.

3. Academic standards.

This value is probably subject to the greatest miscommunication. We all want the very best for our own child, and for future generations. Montessori is taught in a very different way than the vast majority of us experienced in our school years. Some of us decided that what we experienced growing up was exactly right for our child, and some of us want something completely different. In either case, expectations are difficult to communicate. What does it truly mean to receive a superior education in a Montessori fashion? Our belief as an authentic Montessori school is to allow a child to learn and grow at his own pace, no matter how quickly or slowly that may be. Our children test, on average, approximately two years above grade level. That does not mean every child in every area. All of our children are addressed where they are, in the way they learn best, so that they may flourish to the best of their developmental stage and capacity.

4. The development of your child into a good citizen of the world.

You can receive a good, if not superior education in many schools, both public and private. One of the many reasons to choose Montessori education is for its emphasis on global citizenship. We teach character, respect for self, one another and our planet, kindness, conflict resolution skills and setting of individual boundaries. Our biggest challenge as adults is to always model those skills we wish our children to acquire. I was reading an article lately that said children learn the most about relationships and how to treat one another from watching the significant adults in their life interact separately and together.

A Blueprint of our Fundamental Values and Beliefs

The Montessori approach to learning is the educational framework at The Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom. Maria Montessori recognized that “the process” itself was paramount in learning. We embrace this idea that learning is dynamic and welcome new ideas as we grow.

This document serves as a reference point for our thinking about learning at this time. We will review these ideas annually and as necessary to monitor how our choices reflect these ideals. We fully expect this document to change and we invite you to participate in this rewarding experience of discovering new ways to learn and to live.

We affirm that education begins at birth and continues throughout life. While our emphasis is on our children, we are a center of support for all of us to continue learning and developing toward becoming whole and healthy citizens of the world.

Our goals for students are for them to be open-ended and compassionate, to gain a sense of themselves and others, and to understand and appreciate the diversity of the human spirit. Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom wants students to be well trained in the basic academic disciplines, to fulfill their creative potential, and to gain satisfaction in their physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. We want students to love learning and to value knowledge, creativity, and humor. Finally, we hope they will be responsible, critical, and caring members of a pluralistic society and recognize that they have the power and resources to effect change as well as the self-esteem and confidence to pursue their goals.

Our Vision

Our vision is of an educational system that serves a world that lives in peace; a global community based on interdependence and respect for all life and people.

Our Mission

Our school’s mission is to cultivate confident and creative builders of the future. We prepare a developmentally appropriate environment that enables individual learning styles as per the philosophy of Maria Montessori. Our diverse community nurtures values that create social responsibility and mutual respect, enhanced by a strong partnership between school and home.

Our program rests on four pillars

- The cultivation within our students of a passion for excellence in everything they do, both in and outside of school
- The development a strongly held set of universal values, which include self-respect, respect for others, honesty, integrity, responsibility, empathy, compassion, kindness, peacefulness, a sense of concern for others, warmth, and a love of community
- The development of a global perspective and sense of international understanding
- And a lifelong commitment to give something back through service to others who are in need

HISTORY

Raritan Valley Montessori was founded as a Montessori school in 1967 in the South Branch Reformed Church, South Branch, New Jersey. It is one of the oldest Montessori Schools in New Jersey and one of the older ones in the United States. The original name of the school was The Carroll School. In 1969, the school changed ownership from a private individual to a parent cooperative and was renamed Raritan Valley Montessori School. In June of 1985, the school was sold to Leslie Meldrum, once again becoming a private corporation. In August of 1994 the school moved to Flagtown. In September of 1997, our Elementary program moved to the PeopleCare Building in Bridgewater, and became a non-profit school, Raritan Valley Montessori Academy. In September of 1998, we opened 2 more classes in that building. In September of 2003, we added our Stepping Stones program and an Elementary Program at our Flagtown campus. In September 2004, the Flagtown School was renamed “The Cherry Blossom, A Montessori School”. In September 2009 we added a Stepping Stones program in Bridgewater. At present, we have a Stepping Stone classroom, three Primary classrooms, and an Lower & Upper Elementary program at each site. We are affiliated with the American Montessori Society (AMS). We are also certified by the New Jersey Division of Youth and Family Services for the education of young children.

PHILOSOPHY

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom provides an environment based on the principles of education constructed by Maria Montessori for children aged six weeks through twelve years. This educational opportunity is offered to all children regardless of race, creed, or color.

The classroom environment provides each child with the opportunity to experience the excitement of learning through his own choices and thus will help to foster in the child a sense of independence, individuality, and a love of learning. The environment is planned to enhance and stimulate the development of the child emotionally, socially, physically, and intellectually.

Montessori education is designed to provide a wide variety of learning experiences geared to the developmental needs of the individual child. In this setting, children are helped to protect and expand whatever is within their talents and capacities: to protect their freedom and to respect the rights of others, and are given the opportunity to develop their individual potentials.

Our qualified staff provides a Montessori environment that is clean, healthful and encourages the child to grow mentally and physically. Our school is dedicated to open communication between parents, staff, administration and child. This open communication helps to promote the quality of education to which the school is committed. Our school believes in the 3 R's of Montessori:

1. Respect for Self
2. Respect for others
3. Respect for the Environment

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the School is to provide a carefully planned environment which will encourage children to develop within themselves the foundational habits, attitudes, skills and ideas which are essential for a lifetime of successful, creative thinking and learning.

The specific goals for the children who attend our school are:

1. To develop a positive attitude toward school and learning.
2. To develop a sense of high self-esteem.
3. To build a habit of concentration for lifelong study skills.
4. To develop and foster an abiding curiosity.
5. To develop habits of initiative and persistence.
6. To foster inner discipline and a sense of order.
7. To develop sensory-motor skills in order to sharpen the ability to discriminate and judge.
8. To develop socially acceptable behavior.
9. To acquire the basic skills necessary for a lifetime of learning.
10. To help develop each child's innate, ultimate potential through high self-expectations.
11. To provide an extraordinary educational opportunity.

PROMISES

We promise:

1. To accept that each child learns at his/her own rate in mind, body, and spirit.
2. To provide a safe and clean environment.
3. To provide two-way communication regarding your child.
4. To relate in a caring professional manner with respect and dignity.
5. To maintain a well-trained staff, committed to continuing education.
6. To provide an extraordinary educational experience.
7. To set an example in educational leadership.

STAFF

Our Head/Lead Teachers will be happy to answer any of your questions regarding your children. They are responsible for instructing your children, preparing the environment, and the overall daily functioning of their classrooms.

Our Assistants/Interns/Co-teachers help in all matters. They are responsible for the care and maintenance of the classroom as well as assisting the Head/Lead in the instruction of your children.

Our Administrators are in charge of the day-to-day activities of the site they are assigned to. They will take care of your concerns, as well as relaying any messages to Leslie Meldrum which require her attention.

The following people are the members of our staff, and what you can count on them to provide for you. Each member of our staff plays a very important role in the nurturing, care and education of your children.

Head of School -----Leslie S. Meldrum
Associate Head of School -----Donna Fiumara
Director of Admissions-----Diane M. Dodds
Director of Development -----Tina Paccione

Flagtown Campus:

Site Administrator-----Donna Fiumara
Assistant Administrator-----Seleste McDaniel

Dr. Seuss Room (Stepping Stones)

Head Teacher -----Stefanie Fedora

Mahatma Gandhi Room (Primary)

Head Teacher -----Anu Krishnan
Assistant -----Marianne Harkness

Jacques Cousteau Room (Primary)

Head Teacher and Kindergarten Enrichment -----Stacy Catoggio
Co-Teacher -----Joanna Byra

Mother Teresa Room (Primary)

Head Teacher ----- Nancy Tamburello
Co-Teacher -----Linda Freitag

Albert Einstein Room (Lower Elementary)

Head Teacher -----Tamara Mount
Assistant -----Maneesha Dave

Michelangelo Room (Upper Elementary)

Head Teacher -----Carol Young
Assistant -----AnnMarie Burlew

After-school Program

Head Teacher -----Cindy Fonzetti

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Bridgewater Campus:

Site Administrator-----Diane M. Dodds
Administrative Assistant-----Janet Moody

Neil Armstrong Room (Stepping Stones)

Lead Teacher-----Angela Chang
Intern -----Aisha Kassam

Emily Dickinson Room (Primary)

Head Teacher -----Hemani Kathuria
Assistant -----Stacey Murray

Rosa Parks Room (Primary)

Head Teacher -----Carrie Ward
Assistant -----Lynda Duffy

Martin Luther King Jr. Room (Primary)

Lead Teacher and Kindergarten Enrichment -----Carol Nittoli
Assistant -----Mahnaz Vaziri

Maria Montessori Room (Lower Elementary)

Master Teacher-----Bindu Sharma
Co-Teacher -----Grace Kochanik
Assistant -----Olga Spinelli

Room (Upper Elementary)

Lead Teacher-----Regina Randon
Intern -----Mara Metzgar

After-school Program

-----Michael McDaniel
-----Jennifer Kitchen

Specials

Physical Education Teacher-----Michael McDaniel
Spanish -----Sandra Hurtado
Music-----Nancy Cesta
Technology-----Jerry Gilbert
Art.....Carrie Ward,Stefanie Fedora
Drama -----Carrie Ward

The Board of Trustees

The Cherry Blossom is a for-profit private corporation owned and operated by Leslie S. Meldrum, President. Raritan Valley Montessori Academy is a non-profit 501(C) (3) Tax Exempt New Jersey educational corporation, governed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. The primary functions of the Board of Trustees are to:

- 1) Support the school’s institutional mission and the fundamental objectives and core values.
- 2) Support the policies under which the school will operate.
- 3) Select a Head of School who is the President of the Board and who translates Raritan Valley Montessori’s mission and objectives into day-to-day operation.
- 4) Look to the future and plan for long-term institutional growth and development.

The members of the Board of Trustees are as follows:

Leslie Meldrum	<i>President</i>	Tenaz Vemuri	<i>Member at Large</i>
Ron Meldrum	<i>Vice President and Treasurer</i>	Ryan Meldrum	<i>Member at Large</i>
John Fiumara Esq.	<i>Secretary</i>	Lee Zulanch	<i>Member at Large</i>

ADMISSIONS POLICY

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom is a non-discriminatory corporation dedicated to the education of toddlers through 12-year-old children in accordance with the principles of Maria Montessori as interpreted by the American Montessori Society (AMS). Admission is granted based on the decision by the school with regard to its belief in whether it can benefit the family seeking admission and the parents who agree with the philosophy of the school and believe it can benefit their child. We believe that every child has the right to go to a school that is a perfect match for them and we endeavor to carry out this belief by our admissions process as well as that of the child and the family's performance throughout the school year. Submission of an application to the school is not a guarantee of acceptance. Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom admits students of any race, color, national or ethnic origin to all the rights privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students at this school. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national, or ethnic origin, in administration of our educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs and athletic and other school-administered programs. We reserve the right to remove a student from our school should the need arise.

School Year

The school year shall be scheduled for 174 child contact days for pre-school age children and 180 child contact days in Kindergarten and Elementary, less those days in which school is cancelled for emergency closings such as snow days. We allow 3 days for Emergency Closings in our calendar.

Classroom Placement

Our staff puts much thought and time into placing children in classrooms. We want every child to be successful in a supportive and challenging environment. Factors include a balance of class size, age, gender, academic strengths, learning styles, social skills, learning needs, parental information and separation of students who are unable to work well together. We recognize there may be times when parents wish to share specific concerns regarding class placement. Your request will be strongly considered, however, the school retains the right to make the final decision regarding class placement. Every possible effort shall be made to insure that a child is retained within the same group of children and/or the same teaching staff as the child started with.

Probationary Period for Children

All families are subject to a six-week probationary period. The usual probationary period occurs at the beginning of the school term for each child and family. This probationary period is held for the purpose of determining that Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom is able to benefit the child and the family.

A child may also be placed on a secondary probationary period at any time throughout the school year at the discretion of the school. This secondary probationary period would be held in the event that there is a change from the child's previous behavior or he is disruptive to the class as a whole. Following this decision, the parent shall be contacted and the problem set forth. The parent will be asked to cooperate in finding a solution to the problem. In the event of a satisfactory solution, no further action will take place. In the event of an unsatisfactory solution in the opinion of the administration of the School, the parent(s) will be advised as to the termination of enrollment.

Statement of Discipline

Discipline in our classrooms is constructed around the precepts of Montessori education. A child that is actively engaged in meaningful work has no need of other discipline. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that each child finds work within the classroom that is appropriate for them. If a child becomes disruptive our staff will utilize Redirecting Children's Behavior techniques and philosophy. Under NO circumstances will abusive language, behavior, or physical means ever be employed to discipline a child. If the child is continually disruptive and a detriment to himself or the classroom as a whole, the parents will be contacted to determine a possible course of events to remedy that behavior within an acceptable period of time. If this method does not cause a change in behavior, the parents will be informed that we cannot benefit their child, and the child will be removed from

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enrollment within the school. Our school personnel are trained in the discipline methods of “Redirecting Children’s Behavior”. Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom has a strong commitment to peace in the world and that it is our children who will be the leaders in that effort. To this end, we strongly encourage every parent take the “Redirecting Children’s Behavior” course that we offer. This course leads parents to become more aware of their impact on their child, their community and the world. This is one more way that we can ensure a partnership between home & school.

Inappropriate Behaviors

Children first learn how to communicate in concrete actions. Words are abstract symbols that occur at a later developmental phase of their life. It is our job together to switch a child from concrete to abstract in their expression. Obviously, a certain amount of physical contact is normal. However, we can not accept children engaging in continuous negative physical contact with the adult members or the children of this school. Children need to be encouraged to speak their ideas rather than act them out. We always take action on children’s negative physical interactions. If a child is aggressive toward other children or adults in school, we will utilize different methods including, at our discretion, require that the child be excused from school. The return date to school will be discussed with the parents and what actions may be required for the child to return. A child may not return to school until all requirements have been met to the satisfaction of the administration. Please see form 10:122-6.8 recommended by the state of New Jersey. When we are unsuccessful by these methods, we will request that you seek alternative solutions. We may recommend dismissal, if we feel that we are not making progress in this area with our methods. It is our firm belief that every child has the right to be safe in school.

Withdrawal & Dismissal

Withdrawal:

In the event a student withdraws from the school at any time other than relocation outside of 10 miles from the school, full tuition, all fees and any other charges outstanding shall become immediately due and payable. There shall be no refunds of any prepaid tuition, fees, or other amounts paid under any circumstances except in the event the student and his immediate family shall relocate their primary residence outside of 10 miles from the school. Parents shall be charged for the non-refundable deposit of \$550 and the balance of the month of withdrawal plus one additional regular month’s tuition payment. Proof of relocation is required in the form of a notarized employer letter or proof of new residence, including such items as a utility bill or mortgage. All requests shall be in writing and be sent to the school via Certified Mail Return Receipt Requested. Refunds will not be issued until all supporting documentation is provided. No refunds will be made if a child withdraws from the school after February 28, 2012.

Dismissal:

The school reserves the right to place the student. The school also reserves the right to dismiss the student from the school at any time where the school in its sole discretion determines that the student is not benefiting from attending the school or when the student is an impediment to the well being of the school. Any student or parent who, at the sole discretion of the school interferes with the philosophy or operation of the school shall be subject to dismissal. In the event a student is dismissed from the school tuition will be prorated to the end of the last month of attendance and any prepaid tuition beyond the month of dismissal shall be refunded to the parents. Any past due charges shall become immediately due in full.

Expulsion Policy

Unfortunately, there are sometimes reasons we have to exclude a child from our program either on a short term or permanent basis. We want you to know we will do everything possible to work with the family of the child(ren) in order to prevent this policy from being enforced. The following are reasons we may have to terminate or suspend a child from this center:

PARENTAL ACTIONS REQUIRING REMOVAL OF THEIR CHILD

- Failure to pay/habitual lateness in payments
- Failure to complete required forms including the child's immunization records
- Habitual tardiness when picking up your child
- Physical or verbal abuse to staff

CHILD'S ACTIONS REQUIRING REMOVAL

- Failure of child to adjust after a reasonable amount of time
- Uncontrollable tantrums/angry outbursts
- Physical or verbal abuse to staff or other children
- Frequent Biting

PROACTIVE ACTIONS THAT WILL BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO PREVENT EXPULSION

- Staff will try to redirect child from negative behavior
- Staff will reassess classroom environment, appropriate of activities, supervision
- Staff will always use positive methods and language while disciplining children
- Staff will praise appropriate behaviors
- Staff will consistently apply consequences for rules
- Child will be given verbal warnings
- Child may lose certain privileges
- Child's disruptive behavior will be documented and maintained in confidentiality
- Parent/guardian will be notified verbally
- Parent/guardian will be given written copies of the disruptive behaviors that might lead to removal
- The director, classroom staff and parent/guardian will have a conference(s) to discuss how to promote positive behaviors
- The parent will be given literature or other resources regarding methods of improving behavior
- Recommendation of evaluation by professional consultation on premises
- Recommendation of evaluation by local school district child study team

SCHEDULE OF REMOVAL

- If after the remedial actions above not worked, the child's parent/guardian will be advised verbally and in writing about the child's or parent's behavior warranting an expulsion. Removal action is meant to occur a period of time so that the parent/guardian may work on the child's behavior or to come to an agreement with the center.
 - The parent/guardian will be informed regarding the length of the removal period
 - The parent/guardian will be informed about the expected behavioral changes required in order for the child or parent to return to the school
 - The parent/guardian will be given a specific removal date that allows the parent an adequate amount of time to seek alternate child care (usually one to two weeks notice depending on risk to other children's welfare or safety)

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- Failure of the child/parent to satisfy the terms of the plan may result in permanent expulsion from the center

A Child will be not be removed

- If a child's parent(s):
 - Made a complaint to the Office of Licensing regarding a school's alleged violations of the licensing requirements (1-877-667-9845)
 - Reported abuse or neglect occurring at the center (1-877-NJ ABUSE) [1-877-652-2873]
 - Questioned the center regarding policies and procedures

EDUCATIONAL SEQUENCE

It is the belief of this school that a child enrolled within the school gets the maximum benefit that a Montessori education has to offer by being enrolled for the entirety of each three-year cycle. For children to discover themselves and maximize their potential, it is essential that their growth and development not be disrupted and fragmented. As children's advocates, Montessorians believe that it is a disservice to children to interrupt the continuity of their growth and development by constantly changing the people and the environments in their lives. It is within the third year of each cycle of our Montessori program that a child is presented with the opportunity of coalescing the divergent areas of the preschool curriculum into an integrated whole, thus preparing him or her with the concepts Maria Montessori believed essential to the growth of a healthy, mature, ordered mind. Within this year the experiences of the previous years are integrated with further related exploration.

Rosa Packard, a former student of Maria Montessori, and a consultant to the American Montessori Society described the importance and the sequence of the three-year cycle in her book **THE HIDDEN HINGE**. She explains the cycle as within the first school year the majority of the presentations of the Montessori materials of that period occur. The second year sees much more meaningful usage of the materials themselves. In the third year the child is able to use what he or she has previously learned to integrate more than one area of the classroom at a time, and to move from the concrete materials into abstractions and more sophisticated conceptualizations. The child is deprived of the benefits of this cycle without completing all three years. In some cases due to age and/or maturity level we recommend a fourth year of that cycle prior to moving on to another experience or the next Montessori level. We will make this recommendation when the cutoff for entrance into the following school system prevents a child from entering directly into the next level or other related maturity issues. For those children who need it, we find that the fourth year spent in a Montessori classroom cycle can yield even greater benefits than those found within the first three years.

Kindergarten Enrichment Program

Our school offers a specialized Kindergarten Enrichment program. The Kindergarten aged child is in a traditional Montessori classroom in the morning, and in the afternoon the kindergarten students are gathered into one group and given lessons in Junior Great Books, Science, Physical Education and Cultural subjects. We also observe our local public schools age cutoff dates of five by October 1 of that current school year. We carefully track and insure that each child leaves at the end of each of our 3 year cycles with all of the skills and knowledge necessary for them to succeed and integrate into which ever school environment they enter into next. A child who has not completed the entire three years for the particular cycle he is in may or may not have acquired the necessary skills for his grade as Montessori does not work in one year increments.

Elementary Program

Montessori education begins in early childhood and continues into the child's elementary and even adolescent years. It is an extension of their preschool learning, responding to the changing developmental needs of the child. Maria Montessori wrote: "The successive levels of education must conform to the successive personalities of the child."

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The elementary child makes an important developmental change by moving into abstract thought and away from concrete learning. Montessori describes this as the “cosmic” expansion into abstract learning. While mathematics, reading and writing remain corner stones and continue to be perfected they now act as a vehicle for a more extensive form of education. A child at this stage of development wants to know everything about everything and according to Maria Montessori an elementary education should cater to this need by speaking to the child’s imagination.

“Everything invented by man, physical or mental, is the fruit of someone’s imagination. In the study of history and geography we are helpless without imagination, and when we propose to introduce the universe to the child, what but imagination can be of use to us”.....*Maria Montessori*

The purpose of an elementary education is to present the child with the whole image. The curriculum is extensive, covering all subject areas. This not only provides the child with knowledge of the universe but also an understanding of their place within the big picture.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom follows the Montessori philosophy in both our preschool and elementary programs. We are committed to providing the child with an academically challenging program, as their developmental needs change.

Section 2: Morning and Afternoon Procedures

School hours

The Primary and Elementary School classrooms will be open to students at 8:25a.m. The Stepping Stones classroom will be open to students at 8:45 A.M. Students who arrive at school earlier will be accepted into the Before School Program and charged for an hour of care.

All Primary and Elementary students are to be in class no later than 8:45 AM. Students who arrive later than 8:45 am must go directly to the school office. Those children will wait in the office area for a teacher to come pick them up or the office staff will admit them into class.

The school day will end at 3:00 PM for Primary and Stepping Stones classes and 3:15 for the Elementary classes. All full-day students will be expected to remain until class is dismissed.

Picking your child up early: There may be occasions where you will need to take your child out of school early for a doctor's appointment or other similar obligations. We ask that this be done as little as possible. To ensure that your child will be ready when you get here, please send a note to the teachers that will let them know the time that you will be picking up your child. Upon your arrival, the office will send a staff member get your child for the early dismissal.

Saying Good-bye: Tips for Parents on Separation

It can be difficult for parents and young children to separate at the beginning of the school year. We have found that a short and positive good-bye is easiest for the child. We do not recommend parents bringing their child into the classroom. The prolonged good-bye often makes the separation more difficult. Feel free to call the school at any time for reassurance that your child has settled in and is adjusting well.

Morning Arrival

Primary and Elementary Students Morning Arrival:

If you arrive earlier than 8:25am, please park your car in the parking lot and accompany your child into the building. There you will ensure that the child is turned over to a waiting staff member and your child's arrival time will be written down, and you will be charged for before school care.

For our 8:25am "Drop Off", stay in your car with your child and take your place in the line forming in front of our door. A staff member will be at the door to meet your car. Have your child(ren)'s seatbelt removed and all their possessions within their grasp. The staff will open the car door on the side closest to the building and assist your child in exiting from the car. Your child will then be seen safely into the building. If you prefer, you may park your car and accompany your child to class. At our Bridgewater location, you must park in the rear parking lot only.

If you arrive later than 8:45am, please park your car in the lot and accompany your child to the main office. There your child will be met by a staff member and accompanied to class. We do not permit you to accompany your late child to class. We highly encourage you to make every effort to be on time for your child's maximum benefit.

If you need to speak with a teacher or get out of your car for any reason, please park in a designated space. For safety reasons, always keep your children by your side. Never allow them to run ahead, especially into the parking lot.

Stepping Stones Morning Arrival:

Please arrive at the school no earlier than 8:45 a.m., park your car in the parking lot, accompany your child into the building, and walk him/her to their classroom. If you need to drop your child off before 8:45 a.m., accompany your child into the building and sign him/her into before school care. If you arrive after 9:00 a.m., accompany your child into the office. Your child will be met by a staff member and accompanied to class. We do not permit you to accompany your late child to class. We highly encourage you to make every effort to be on time for your child's maximum benefit.

For safety reasons, always keep your children by your side. Never allow them to run ahead, especially into the parking lot.

Dismissal

Unless we receive specific permission from you to do otherwise, we will only release your child to the people that you have specifically indicated on the release form that every family completes annually.

We must receive a note, or in an emergency, a phone call from you in order to release your child to someone not on your list. This rule also applies to students going home with friends. We will require photo identification of anyone whom you've given permission to pick up your child if he or she is not familiar to our staff. Please make sure all of your car-pool drivers are on your release list.

Half Day dismissal is at 11:30am for Stepping Stones Students and 12:00pm for Primary students. For Half Day dismissal, please park your car in the parking lot and come into the building. A staff member will be waiting for you and dismiss your child to you. Please make every effort to be prompt at dismissal. If a child is the last one to regularly be picked up, it affects their attitude toward school as they can feel singled out or different. When parents are late, it worries the children.

Full Day dismissal is at 3:00pm for all Primary and Stepping Stones students and 3:15pm for all Elementary students. Parents who have not picked up their children within 10 minutes of dismissal time will pick them up from our After School Program. In such cases, the parents will be charged a fee for this after-school care. The school cannot be responsible for students, unless they are enrolled in the After School Program or are participating in one of the Extra-curricular activities.

Before/After School Program (ASP)

Our Before/After School Program is available to all of our students between 7:00am-6:30pm apart from their scheduled academic day . You may use this program on an Hourly basis or on a Flat Rate program. If you use it on an Hourly basis, you will be charged an hourly rate. After the first 15 minutes of each hour, you will be billed for the full hour. Billing is done monthly and is due upon receipt. For the Flat Rate program, an initial deposit is required and the balance can be paid in equal monthly installments. There is a one-time program change per academic year permitted; flat to hourly rate or hourly to flat rate. Parents must sign out their child in the ASP attendance book, noting the time. If you neglect to sign your child out, you may be charged until 6:30p.m, regardless of the time of your departure.

Please note that for pickup after 6:30pm, you will be charged for an additional hour plus a late fee of \$25 per occurrence per child. If you pickup late more than 3 times, you may not be able to use the program in the future.

Release of Children

Each child may be released only to the child's custodial parent(s) or person(s) authorized by the custodial parent(s), to take the child from our school and to assume responsibility for the child in an emergency if the custodial parent(s) cannot be reached. In the event a parent fails to pick up a child by our regular closing time, we are required by the Division of Youth and Family Services to institute the following procedures:

1. The child is supervised at all times
2. Staff members attempt to contact the parent or persons authorized by the parent.
3. An hour or more after closing time, and provided that other arrangements for releasing the child to his/her parents or authorized persons have failed and we cannot continue to supervise the child at the center, the staff member shall call the Division's 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-792-8610) to seek assistance in caring for the child until the parents or persons authorized are able to pick up the child.

If a parent or person authorized by the parent appears to be physically and/or emotionally impaired to the extent that, in the judgment of the director and/or staff member, the child would be placed at risk of harm if released to such an individual, the following procedures are mandated by the Division of Youth and Family Services:

1. The child may not be released to such an impaired individual;
2. Staff members attempt to contact the child's other parent or an alternate person authorized by the parent.
3. If we are unable to make alternative arrangements, we shall call the Division's 24-hour Child Abuse Hotline to seek assistance in caring for the child.

Custodial Parent

All custodial parent arrangements must be documented in the child's records. We require a copy of the custody papers. We also require written authorization from the custodial parent to allow visits by or releases to the non-custodial parent or a copy of the court order denying access. However, as a school that believes in partnership, we will not accept any child whose parents have not been able to work out their beliefs and roles regarding their child's education in a manner which we can cooperate with. This school will never allow itself to be a pawn in a custody battle for the child. We will not hold separate conferences, mailings, billings, notifications, etc for parents who are not living together. There is no way for us to teach a child our core beliefs about universal values if their parents cannot demonstrate them at home and who cannot partner with each other in the raising and educating of their child. The school will, at its discretion, dismiss or not accept a family into enrollment within the school who has not worked out these issues.

An exception may be requested by a court order prior to the child's entering school by either or both parents; the request would require full consideration of the legal ramifications and other relevant matters, to the effect that dual communication is not required, desired, or to be pursued. If granted, this exception (documented by a signed court order) would be noted in the child's permanent file and honored as indicated.

- Invitations to school functions are open to both parents.
- When family conferences are scheduled, we need to avoid separate conferences for each parent. It is terribly important to communicate the same thing to both parents at the same time. If either parent is uncomfortable with scheduling joint conferences, he or she should contact the office to discuss the situation.
- Both parents are equally welcomed at all school events.
- Free and open communication among all parties is encouraged so that everyone is fully informed.

Attendance

All Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom students, even our youngest are expected to attend school on a daily basis, arriving by the start of the school day.

Consistent attendance and prompt arrival are still essential. Students in the Primary and Elementary programs are expected to be in class at 8:30 a.m. and to be present in class for the full school day (or for the full morning session in the case of younger students enrolled for the half-day option) and at other required school activities. Students in the Stepping Stones program are expected to be in class by 9:00am on their scheduled days.

Late arrival is disruptive and inconsiderate to the rest of the class, and nothing can be more disruptive to a child's education than irregular attendance.

We depend on your family's full support in this area. If we find that your child is arriving late often, we will need to work out a solution.

Every once in a while we all love to take a little vacation from school. While we are fairly understanding and supportive, it is still important that you keep your child's absences from school to a minimum. If your child's absences are excessive, we cannot do our job. Your child may be at risk of not being exposed to important concepts and may then find it difficult to progress at an appropriate pace. We expect a child to be absent no more than a total of 10 days per school year and still be able to be successful.

Although our program is individualized, it still depends upon consistency and continuous progress. Every time a child misses school for whatever reason there is a period of readjustment as she tries to get back into the routine of her work. The longer the absence, or when a child consistently misses a day or two of school regularly, the more detrimental it becomes to his educational development.

Whenever your child has missed a day or more of school for whatever reason, please stop by the office to fill out an absence form. Whenever your child needs to be excused early from school, please send in a note to the teachers indicating the nature of the absence and the time when you will want her to be excused from class.

Specials

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's Specials Program offers Primary and Elementary students a range of courses and activities. Specials may be offered in the Fine Arts, Music, Drama, Spanish, Physical Education, Sports, Computers or other areas. Parents are invited to share their talents and interests with the children by leading or assisting with Specials during the school year. Children enrolled in the Stepping Stones program are offered music and Spanish on certain designated days.

Extra-Curricular classes are offered during after school hours. These enrichment courses may include such activities as art, computers, dance, karate and sports. A schedule of offerings is posted on our website.

Unexpected Closings

School will be closed on occasion for weather uncertainties or other unforeseen circumstances making travel hazardous or other unsafe conditions. You will be notified of these closings as soon as the decision to close is reached. RVM/The Cherry Blossom uses a calling system to notify parents at your home number of emergency closings. Notification of emergency closings will also be recorded on the school answering machines. In the event of uncertain weather beginning after the official opening of school, please call the school if you cannot be reached at home, since we sometimes feel it advisable to close school early. We urge you to use your own discretion regarding driving conditions when school remains open. Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom makes this decision independently of the Public School systems. Early morning closings will be announced around 6:30 a.m.

Section 3: Everyday Life at Raritan Valley/The Cherry Blossom

Starting School

Many young children and their parents feel a bit nervous when they leave one another in an unfamiliar situation. A few tears may even be expected. If this is your child's first year at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom, we encourage you to visit our campus before school to allow him or her to become familiar with the new setting. Walk the grounds. Be reassuring as you talk with your child about his or her new school. New parents and students will have an orientation before school starts when children can visit the classroom and meet their new teachers.

On the first day of school, please do not linger too long during drop off in the class or react with alarm if your child is hesitant about the separation. It is very important to reassure him about where you will be during the day, and by what time you will pick him up in the afternoon. Some children may be sad for a little while during the first two weeks, but kind words and reassurance almost always alleviate their fears. The teachers are wonderful in helping children through these situations.

Required School Dress

Stepping Stones & Primary Students

- > Stepping Stones and Primary students are not required to wear school uniforms. They can purchase school embroidered clothing or other spirit wear from Lands' End if they wish.
- > Students should dress in clothing that they can put on and fasten for themselves: elastic waistbands, Velcro sneakers, etc. In addition, children should not wear clothing to school that should not get soiled. The children do go outside daily in addition to painting, using glue and other art related activities. Although they are required to wear smocks, it is quite possible that your child may get some of these materials on their clothing.
- > **Please label all students' clothing with their name.**
- > Please do not allow your child to come in wearing:
 - Clothing with holes or tears
 - Pocket chains
 - Oversized pants or shorts
 - Clothing that confines them from participating in all activities, or could be destroyed by participating.
- > Please do not allow your child to come to school wearing:
 - Cowboy boots
 - Shoes with cleats
 - Platform shoes or high heels
 - Flip Flops or open-toed sandals

Elementary Students

- > Raritan Valley Montessori/ The Cherry Blossom have adopted a School Uniform and Dress Code for Elementary daily wear (3 days) and an athletic outfit (2 days) for Elementary Gym.
 1. Please refer to the school's Uniform and Dress Code description for approved colors/styles.
 2. The school polo shirts are to be worn on all field trips and on regular school days. Clothing monogrammed with the school logo may be purchased from the Land's End school uniform catalogue. Logo patches are for sale in the front office.
 3. Gym is held twice a week.
 4. Dress should be neat and clean. The uniform should be free of stains and holes/tears.

Playground/Outdoors

Please be aware that our students go outside on a daily basis. Please make sure that your child is dressed appropriately for the weather. We will not go outside when the temperature is lower than 28 degrees and/or raining. We believe that the fresh air, exercise and a change of environment are essential for their growth. Unless we have a doctor's note to the contrary, we will be taking your child outside. If you feel that your child is too sick to go outside, please keep your child at home.

What students need at school:

- > Stepping Stones and Primary students
 - An extra set of clothing, including underwear, socks, to be kept at school during the year, held in a Ziploc bag labeled with your child's name
 - A nap bag kit for full day children under the age of 5 must be purchased from the school.
 - An insulated plastic lunch box with a thermos (for hot lunches when appropriate) that the child can open, a plastic cup, and utensils that can be sent home nightly. Include a reusable freezer block to keep perishables fresh.

- > Elementary students work with a variety of school supplies which parents will need to purchase before school. A detailed list will be posted on our website

Personal Belongings, Toys, and Money – These items should not be brought to school. They are often lost, fought over or broken. Please check pockets for unfamiliar objects when your child returns home; these are usually part of our school materials and are often very costly to replace.

Textbooks, Phonetic Readers, Library Books

The Montessori curriculum is based on library research, rather than the traditional dependence on textbooks as the primary focus of learning. Much of our students work in school involves the use of hands-on materials that remain in the classroom or readings in a wide range of reference or source books from the school and public libraries. Some subjects do involve the use of texts that will remain with the children throughout the year.

Naturally, it is essential that the children respect and take care of all books. Students are responsible for lost or damaged texts, phonetic readers, library books or other school materials. Students' families are also responsible for the cost of repair or replacement of materials that have been misused resulting in their damage or loss. School records will not be forwarded for any family whose account is not completely clear of all charges.

Lunch

If your child is staying for lunch at school, you may either send in a lunch box from home or order a hot lunch through our Hot Lunch Program. Raritan Valley Montessori & The Cherry Blossom encourage healthy eating habits. Please pack a well-balanced, nutritional meal, excluding candy, soda, sugary cakes, yogurt with sprinkles, and other highly sugared foods. Lunch is a very important part of not only your child's school day, but of her wellness education as well. We count on you to work with us to teach her about health and nutrition.

With younger children, it is a good idea to prepare food in small, easy-to-handle servings, such as cutting sandwiches into quarters, slicing up fresh fruit, and preparing bite sized slices of cheese.

Please do not send any glass bottles. Make sure the children's names are clearly marked on their lunch boxes. Please provide a clearly labeled lunch-box when you are not ordering hot lunch. Please also assure this lunch box goes home every night, as we do not want a child eating food that has been left over from the night before.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom

We obtain our hot lunches from various restaurant sources. Lunch orders are placed on a monthly basis. On the 11th of every month a form will be available to fill out for hot lunches and milk for the upcoming month. You will be able to submit the form up until the 25th of the month. We will be placing our lunch and milk orders based on the information provided by the returned lunch forms. If your child will not be attending school on a date that you have already ordered lunch for, please call the school, no later than 8:30 AM of that date and cancel his/her lunch, even if it is a class wide field trip. If you do not call, we will not cancel your child's lunch. If no call is received, or is received after 8:30, no credit will be forthcoming, as we have already ordered and paid for that lunch. Whole milk or low fat chocolate milk may be ordered on a daily basis for a month at a time. No credits can be given for milk when your child is not present. If your child comes to school without lunch, we will prepare a lunch for them out of whatever products we have on hand. You will be charged a hot lunch fee for this.

Bathroom Use

Please be aware that children in our Primary and Elementary programs are expected to be fully and completely toilet trained. This means no pull-ups will be allowed. Children must have complete independence with clothing and wiping themselves in the bathroom. In order for a child to be considered for these programs, they must be fully toilet trained.

Snacks

Elementary students will bring their own "brain food" snacks. Stepping Stone and Primary students will be provided a snack in the morning and afternoon sessions. If your child has special dietary requirements, we request that you send in their snack with them daily. We attempt to work with you as closely as possible to fulfill the child's special requirements. It is your responsibility to explain to your child that he is not allowed to eat anything except what you send. You will find that your child is usually very understanding and responsive in this situation. Please do remember that this is a snack and is not intended to replace a main meal. No child is ever forced or coerced into eating either their lunch or snack. Parents are welcome to sign up for a special snack from their home. This parent snack represents a special shared time between you, your child and the school. Children are thrilled to have their class eat a snack that was made by "Mommy and Me!" We also have many food preparation lessons that include fruit, veggies, cheese, etc.

Please be sure to notify the teachers if your child should avoid certain foods. This will be taken into account in planning snacks or on days when the class prepares its own lunch.

Naptime

All Primary children not in the Kindergarten Enrichment Program, who are staying for the full day program, are required to lie down after lunch. You are required to purchase a naptime package from the school and use it each year. The naptime package includes a mat, a pillow, a blanket, and a sheet all enclosed in a matching tote bag with the child's name written on it. These will go home every Friday for laundering, and returned on Monday. If a child falls asleep during this period, they will continue to sleep supervised by an adult. If a child requires a special article of comfort for his nap such as a lovey, we encourage you to send it to school with him where we will keep it for naptime.

Field Trips

We schedule one field trip per year for our preschool classes to a farm/pumpkin patch. We take extra field trips with our Kindergarten and Elementary classes to various places of interest in coordination with their studies or with special community events.

For any child to go on a field trip, we must have a signed permission slip for that particular field trip from the parent. We cannot accept a verbal permission. We need volunteers for each field trip to drive and help supervise the children. In order to be a driver on a field trip, you must have a "Parent Volunteer Driver Agreement" on file with the main office. A small number of children are assigned to each adult to aid in ease of supervision. We welcome your support and presence on our field trips, as they are impossible without you, the parent. Field trips may involve a small fee.

Volunteer Field Trip Drivers / Chaperones

- Volunteer field trip drivers must have a Parent Volunteer Driver Agreement on file with the main office, a valid driver's license and automobile insurance; the school's insurance does cover field trip volunteer drivers and vehicles in addition to their individual insurance.
- If you volunteer to drive, please plan to stay with the group at all times during the field trip unless the teachers confirm that you are not needed to chaperone as well.
- We must insist that you do not bring any younger siblings along when you drive on a field trip.
- In the event that you will be coming along to chaperone but not drive, please ride in the car to which you are assigned. We do not allow students to switch cars to sit with friends and ask you to model the rule.
- The teachers usually have a handout with further specific suggestions for making the field trip a success.

Birthdays

Children love to celebrate their birthdays with their friends. In the Primary Program, we have a special birthday ceremony in which we tell the class the story of the birthday child's life. Please send in a photograph of your child at each year of his life. It is especially nice to send in a special snack in honor of your child's birthday. Small muffins, oatmeal cookies, etc. work well, but please keep sugar to a minimum, keeping in mind that it is usually celebrated during the morning hours. It is also a tradition to present the school with a small gift in honor of your child's birthday. Some suggestions are a Montessori material, or a book donated to the library in the child's name.

Celebrations

Celebrations are emphasized by all classes during the course of the year; however, each class adds its own special touch on each celebration. Celebrations are meant to provide a social, cultural or historical experience and not a religious one; the celebration will not include worship such as bowing or genuflecting. The following list is not meant to be exhaustive or an exact description of all of our celebrations. Some of the annual traditions we celebrate will include:

- Fall Picnic: Held shortly after school reopens; it gives all of our families a chance to get together for a picnic, and traditional outdoor games and events.
- Cultural festivals: culminating our on-going international studies units, help the children pull together everything they have learned.
- Family Pumpkin Carving: A wonderful time for families to spend time together.
- Thanksgiving: A celebration for reflection, giving and community service. Classes will prepare a Thanksgiving feast to enjoy with one another. The story of the first Thanksgiving will be retold and often dramatized.
- Hibernation Day: We prepare for the Winter solstice. We all come to school in our pajamas, study hibernating animals and prepare to hibernate for our winter vacation.
- Christmas, Hanukah & Kwanzaa: The stories of these three holidays are retold, with rich cultural and artistic projects and activities.
- Winter Wonderland: This is an international celebration held in December. We all enjoy food from many nations, and the children participate in winter arts and crafts.
- Family Day: A traditional family event that occurs in the early Spring. Parents, Grandparents and special friends are invited to share a morning with students in the classroom.
- Acknowledge Your Friend Day (Valentine's Day): The children share presentations expressing themes of love, family and friends.
- One Hundredth Day of School: Children celebrate the fact that they have been in school for 100 days in fun and creative ways to explore the number 100.
- President's Day: We celebrate a bit of American history through the lives of past presidents, especially George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.
- Passover and Easter: The stories of these two holidays are retold, with rich cultural and artistic projects and activities. Classes may hold children's Seder to celebrate freedom, peace and the fellowship of all humanity.
- People We Love Week: Each child acknowledges two special people in their lives during this week.
- End of Year Plays and Commencements: Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom celebrates the graduation of Kindergarten and of the end of each of the Elementary cycles with a beautiful end of year play and commencement ceremony. This is an occasion for students to say good-bye with words and music, as well as a special time for family gatherings to celebrate the passage of a child from one phase of his life to another.

Section 4: Student Health

When your child is ill

We know that you want your child protected from illness as much as possible and so we ask your cooperation in helping us to protect all children and staff from undue exposures. All children who have an illness should be kept at home.

Determination of your child's health will be based upon the following standards:

Temperature above 100.4 degrees (normal is 96.6-98 degrees) - taken by the axillary (armpit) method

Conjunctivitis (pink eye)

Skin rash other than a localized diaper rash

Vomiting

Diarrhea

Any evidence of lice infestation or nits

Continuous nasal discharge that is unclear in color

Sore Throat

Persistent cough

Earache

Anytime that the child is not feeling well enough to tolerate a normal school day, whether it be due to illness, lack of sleep, or a disruption in the usual family routine

If your child exhibits any of these symptoms, please do not return him to school within a 24 hour period without consulting your pediatrician. In addition, please notify the school if your child has any communicable disease, such as chicken pox, coxsackie, impetigo or head lice, so that we may notify the other parents to be aware if similar symptoms should develop in their child. We also ask that you notify us of any extended absence for any reason.

The Sunshine Suite at Somerset Medical Center

The Sunshine Suite at Somerset Medical Center is a medically supervised daycare program for sick children. The Sunshine Suite provides a valuable option to working parents. It is open to pre-registered children 6 months-14 years of age weekdays 6:30am-6:30pm. For more information call 908-685-2988.

Medication

Under usual circumstances, we will not administer prescription medication to the children. We will not administer over the counter medications or herbal/homeopathic remedies. **Children are not allowed to bring any medicine to school.** Most medications can be put on a schedule by your pediatrician that does not involve school hours. Children on life-saving medications that must be given during school hours need to consult with the office for permission to have our staff administer the medication. Medications will only be accepted in its original bottle from the pharmacy with the doctor's dispensing instructions clearly marked on it.

Physical Examinations and Immunizations

Documentation of physical examination and record of immunization must be provided to the school prior to school entrance. Each child is required to have a physical each year. By order of the Board of Health, we are not allowed to retain a child within the school system for whom we do not have these records on file.

Emergency Care

First aid kits are located in the office and in each classroom. When an emergency occurs, our first efforts are to assess the extent of the emergency in the child, and to deal with it to the extent of our knowledge. While these actions are taking place, if the situation warrants, we will call 911 immediately. Please enable us to do our job by assuring your phone numbers are accurate.

Whenever your child is ill and won't be coming to school, please call the office between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m. to let us know that she will be absent. Upon your child's return, you must fill out an absentee form detailing the illness, in order for your child to re-enter the classroom.

Weather permitting; students will go outside to play every day. If you feel that your child may be too sick to go out to play, he is probably too ill to be at school.

Safety Policy

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom stresses safety through very carefully thought-out ground rules established for each environment. We demonstrate the safe use of all equipment, to impart a sense of safety to each child and to carefully supervise each environment.

1. **NO CHILD IS EVER LEFT ALONE OR UNSUPERVISED.**
2. Children arriving must be placed in the care of a Staff member before the parent/guardian departs.
3. Children are never to leave any designated environment without appropriate adult supervision.
4. Children are always accompanied to and from the playground and the gymnasium.
5. No child is released to anyone except the authorized parent/guardian or his or her designee.
6. No running is allowed anywhere in the school or on its grounds, except in the outdoor playground area itself.
7. For safe evacuation, fire drills are conducted monthly and recorded. Fire Evacuation plans are posted in each classroom and activity area.
9. No child is ever allowed out of an outside door without adult accompaniment.
10. Children on field trips travel in small groups of adult to children. Such trips are designed for the safety of the age of our children. At least one staff person will accompany the parents and children on a field trip.
11. We highly recommend the use of school insignia apparel while on a field trip.
12. We request that you do not provide any of our school door codes to your children. These codes are meant to be used by adults only and not "repeated" aloud outside of the entrances.
13. Your child should not be told that you are waiting right outside for him. This encourages him to try to escape to go look for you.

We need your help to enforce these rules. Please go over these rules with your child. Child safety is no accident.

Section 5: Parents and the School

An Intentional Community Built on Trust, Friendship and Mutual Respect

In a time when it is often difficult to establish positive feelings of continuity, unification and stability in our own neighborhoods, Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom has succeeded in re-creating that positive sense of identity, mutual caring and concern among its students, teachers, and parents that truly define Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom as a community.

Volunteering the Gift of Time and Talent

Parents play a crucial role at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom. This is a community of parents and educators. Ideas and input help to shape the school. Our school is open and responsive to positive suggestions.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom strongly encourages families to feel at home and to participate in the broader life of the school through social and educational activities offered by various organizations of the school. Although many parents spend considerable amounts of time as volunteers at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom, there is no expectation for a set time commitment.

There are some things that even money can't buy, and one of the most valuable contributions that families make to Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom is the gift of their time and expertise. Parents, grandparents, and friends of the school are often found helping out with clerical tasks, assisting in the classrooms, serving as field trip drivers, offering a Special course, planning the next special event, coaching, or serving on school committees.

Parents, guardians and grandparents who give of their time and talent often have special memories of experiences and friendships that endure well beyond their children's graduation.

A few ways in which you can help at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom:

- Lend your time and support to our fund raising efforts
- Help in the library
- Volunteer to be an Ambassador Family to parents new to the school
- Serve on one of the school's committees
- Help the teachers organize field trips or special lessons
- Help organize special events
- Volunteer your time to help the school prepare major mailings
- Teach a Specials course

Class Meetings and Community Events

Class meetings allow for us to take care of some of your needs as parents. They are not a conferencing time. These are your meetings. Any topic that is raised during a meeting that would properly require time to prepare handouts and clarify information will be tabled and scheduled for the next meeting. The focus of Community events is to give us the opportunity to interact as a community. These are events for the whole family to share and participate in. It is a time to socialize with old friends and to make new ones. We hand out a School calendar that will explain each event for you.

Because the purpose of these meetings is to facilitate communication, all views will be heard and discussed. It is perfectly normal for values and perspectives to vary within the group. As members of a school community that teaches children kindness and respect, it is very important for us as parents and teachers to model a high level of consideration and respect for each other. No one can be allowed to dominate a meeting; it is neither appropriate nor

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fair to the larger group. Everyone present will be encouraged to participate and contribute; however, silence is a legitimate part of any meeting.

Finally, we all strive to remember that we are on the same side. We share many common values and interests that brought us together at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom. We need never see ourselves as adversaries, even if we should disagree on a given issue. Concerns and issues that need to be explored and addressed are normal in any institution. There is no such thing as a perfect school, and there will always be a need for new ideas and on-going improvements.

Committees

Committees often work closely with the schools administrative team and professional staff to plan and coordinate specific programs and special events. Committee membership should reflect the particular blend of skills, expertise, perspectives, energy, and enthusiasm best suited to the goals of each committee. Committee Chairmen are appointed and hold office at the discretion of the Head of the School.

Communication between home and school

During the school year, we will post, email, call and send home all sorts of reminders, changes, letters, notes, newsletters, and announcements. Please check your family mail slot in the hallway and your email daily for the latest information & announcements. Changes in the school calendar, along with upcoming events, will always be detailed in the memos.

Electronic Media Representation

We must respectfully request that parents do not link to our website without our knowledge. Please inform us in writing as to your request to use our site as a link on your page. Our public image and reputation is incredibly important to us, and we request that you inform us as to how you are using our name and our website. If we do allow you to use our name and our website, please be tasteful and appropriate about your reference to us. Also, please do not use pictures of our children without their individual parents' consent if you choose to post something to the web.

Facebook:

The School does not have an official Facebook presence at this time. Please be aware that any mention of the school or any groups formed in the name of the school do not have any official sanction from us and we have no idea or control of the content therein. Our staff is not permitted to "friend" a parent or any current student. The staff may "friend" a past student if the student is over 18 years of age. This allows us to protect our professionalism.

Email:

We request that the majority of your communication with our teachers be by email. This allows teachers to give your comments the attention they deserve without taking away attention from the children. Staff will usually respond to your email within 24 to 48 business hours of receipt. If you require a more immediate response, feel free to use any other of the usual communication methods.

Observing the classes at work

Parents are invited and even urged to observe the children at work. Contact the office to let them know when you would like to visit. Unless arrangements have been made in advance, the teachers will not have time to speak with you. You will want to see the class at its normal routine and not responding to the novelty of your presence; therefore, when you visit, please sit in the designated visitor's chair in the classroom. A great deal can be learned by patient and quiet observation of your child and his or her classmates at work.

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During the first sensitive weeks of the school year, students (especially the younger children) are familiarizing themselves with a new routine and new environment. For this reason, we ask parents to avoid class observations during this period. All visitors and volunteers need to sign in to the school office upon their arrival.

Points to look for when you observe:

As you sit down to carefully observe in a Montessori classroom for the first time, what catches your eye? What do you notice on your second or third visit?

How is the classroom organized? What do you notice about the layout of activities, furnishings and shelves?

Pay attention to the way the adults interact with the children. What do you notice?

Perhaps during your observation you will see the teacher correct or discipline a child. What do you notice?

As you observe, try to look for any unwritten rules and procedures that the children are following. What do you notice?

Focus on a particular child other than your own. Follow her work during the course of at least a half-hour. How does she spend her time? How does she select work?

You will see the teachers present several different lessons during your visits to either small groups or individual children. What do you notice about the way they teach?

What do you notice about the educational materials on the shelves and how the children work with them?

What about the Montessori materials seem to be most attractive to the children?

Focus on a few different Montessori materials. What concepts or skills does each isolate?

How do the teachers introduce the children to the materials? Try to catch one child learning from another.

Focus on the control of error built in to several of the materials. How do they self-correct? Try to observe a child correcting her own work through the built-in control of error.

As you observe the children at work, do you sense that there are certain tasks that the children prefer? Are there any that they seem to avoid?

How do you as an adult respond to the Montessori materials? Are you drawn to them? Do you wish that you could have gone to a Montessori school?

What sort of interactions do you notice between the younger and older students?

How does your child feel about being in a multi-age classroom?

What advantages and disadvantages do you see to multi-age grouping?

Please remember when you are observing in a classroom to refrain from talking with the teachers or asking them any questions.

So, what did you do at school today?

Have you experienced frustration when asking this question? Did you get the common answer, “nothing”? Or possibly they tell you everyday that they did the same thing such as play-dough or spooning beans. Don't be alarmed. We can assure you that your child is very busy at school doing a variety of learning activities designed to support his development.

Young children often have difficulty talking about what they do at school. They have done so many things that they often cannot sort out the specifics. Sometimes they don't remember the name of the materials that they used, such as the trinomial cube, the metal insets or the addition strip board.

In addition to the difficulty children may have talking about their school experience, you may have noted that not many papers come home. They can be doing complex math, word building, writing in a sand tray or on chalk boards, geography, and science lessons, all with manipulative materials that will have no paper work to show you their progress.

So how can you find out what your child is doing in school?

1. Ask your child questions that are more specific. “Did you do a counting lesson today? Did you build the tower or work with colors?” Use the newsletter to aid you in this.
2. Set up a time to observe your child in class.
3. Read a Montessori book such as Montessori Today by Paula Polk Lillard.
4. Stop in after school and talk to your child's teacher, or set up an appointment for a formal conference if you prefer.
5. Come to school meetings and workshops.
6. Play school with your child at home. Sometimes children will show you through their play what they are learning.
7. Be patient. In time, it will be obvious that your child is growing and learning everyday.
8. Try lying down with your child at night and asking them about their day. You'll be surprised how much information you get.

“Joy is the indication of internal growth.” Maria Montessori

Section 6: Academic Policies

Homework

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom begins to assign limited homework in Kindergarten; not page after page of busywork; but meaningful, interesting assignments that expand on the topics that the children are pursuing in class and which invite parents and children to work together.

Homework doesn't need to be boring! We try to challenge children to think, explore and pursue tangible projects that give them a sense of satisfaction. Homework is intended to afford students the opportunity to practice and reinforce skills introduced in the classroom. Moreover, there is a certain degree of self-discipline that can be developed within the growing child through the process of completing assignments independently.

When possible, the teachers build in opportunities for children to choose among several alternative assignments. Sometimes teachers will prepare individually negotiated assignments with each student.

Homework should never become a battleground between adult and child. One of our goals as parents and teachers should be to help the children learn how to get organized, budget time, and follow through until the work is completed. Ideally, home challenges will give parents and children a pleasant opportunity to work together on projects that give both parent and child a sense of accomplishment. They are intended to reinforce and extend the curriculum.

Here are just a few examples of assignments that students and families have found to be both interesting and challenging:

- Perform an act of charity or extraordinary kindness.
- Plan and prepare dinner for your family with little or no help from your folks.
- How many square feet of carpet would it take to cover your entire house? Convert this number into square yards. Call two carpet dealers. What kinds of carpet do they offer and what would it cost to carpet your house?
- Develop a pen pal in a Montessori school across the USA or in another country.
- Prepare a timeline of the Presidents of the United States, along with picture cards, nametags and fact cards. Study until you can complete the timeline on your own.

Student Work Sent Home

At the end of each week, we will send home any school work that the child wants to bring home. Some of the work that may come home will include drawings, art projects, math problems, stories, metal inset work, and the booklets that the children tend to create as they begin to write.

Although young children tend to be much more interested in the process of work than in tangible products, even four and five year-olds tend to produce enough to create an impressive collection as the months go by.

Family Conferences

It is very important for teachers and parents to establish and maintain close communication. Please feel free to ask questions or discuss anything related to your child's progress. We ask, however, that you understand that the teacher's responsibility during school is to the students. Morning arrival in particular is a very sensitive period when the teachers are greeting each student and setting a calm, pleasant tone for the day. Interruptions need to be kept to a minimum. If you must speak with a teacher in the morning, please arrange to meet before school begins. Otherwise you can correspond via a note, email, or on our voice mail system and the teacher will get back to you.

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Three family conferences will be scheduled over the year: in Fall, Winter and Spring. Additional conferences will be scheduled upon request.

Students who are in Elementary are encouraged to attend all three conferences to review their progress and set some individual goals for the next trimester.

Elementary Individual Learning Plans set forth specific individualized educational goals for each child that teachers and elementary students mutually agree to consciously work toward during the next few months ahead. The student's progress toward fulfilling his or her Individual Learning Plan will be a primary focus of subsequent conferences, progress reports and student self-evaluations.

Evaluation of student progress

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's curriculum is carefully structured and sequenced and the teachers maintain careful records of each student's academic progress.

Because Montessori Schools do not compare students against an arbitrary standard or the performance of their classmates, we do not use familiar letter grades. We send home reports twice a year for Kindergarten and three times a year for Elementary parents to review the children's development, academics and emotional growth.

Standardized Tests

Annually, our Elementary students sit for a full battery of standardized testing. Although the first year students are given the test to introduce them to this type of testing process, we do not begin scoring the tests until the second grade. We do not place a great deal of emphasis on these tests as a reliable measure of an individual student's progress. The tests are notoriously inaccurate, misleading and stressful for children. After working with the same children for three years and carefully observing their work, our teachers come to know far more about their students' progress than can be revealed on a paper and pencil test.

In our culture, test-taking skills are another practical life lesson that children need to master sooner or later. We summarize the students' scores and report the scores to them and their parents. The teachers will be happy to go over your child's individual scores.

Students will also take tests and quizzes on the concepts and skills that they have been studying. We use them as a feedback loop; at times indicating that a student needs a new lesson or more practice, rather than as a needless competition between children for grades.

Promotion from one level to the next

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom has established exit skills for the normal baseline achievement that we expect to see in our students. While students may surpass those standards, they represent a normal index of skills and knowledge that we expect our students to display.

Students will normally be promoted from one grade level to the next at the end of the school year if they have accomplished the exit skills and norms that we have established.

Advancement to the next class level (for example from the primary to the lower elementary level) is based on an evaluation of the child's total academic, social, emotional, and physical/motor development. Because the classes can individually tailor the child's academic program to a large degree, regardless of which group he or she is placed in, the most important criteria for advancement to an older group is often the student's social adjustment, independence, work habits, and maturity. We always invite parents to work with us in reaching these decisions, and focus on what will be in the child's best interests.

Transcripts and Letters of Recommendation to other Schools

By written request, the parent/guardian or, upon attaining the age of majority, the student may ask that a photocopy of the student's file, along with completed recommendation forms, be issued to another school. Copies sent directly are marked "Official Transcript" and are noted in the file.

Many of our students seek and gain admittance to some of the finest schools in the area. These schools often require both the student's transcripts as well as letters of recommendation from the child's teachers. In order for us to fulfill our obligations in a professional manner, we need a written request from the accepting school, as well as signed release forms, specifying what material the parents would like released. A stamped self-addressed envelope directly to the accepting school needs to accompany this request. These documents are not released directly to parents, or they are stamped "COPY", and not considered an official version by us.

Report cards, diplomas, transcripts and letters of recommendation will not be issued if a student has an outstanding balance on his or her account. They will be forwarded once the account has been brought up to date.

Privacy of Student Files

Student files are confidential records and are kept secure from unauthorized access. Each student file contains a log (name, date, and purpose) of those persons or agencies that have had access to the student's file.

Parents or guardians may have access to the child's file by written request to the office at least 24 hours in advance. The file must be viewed in the presence of a Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom staff member, and if they disagree with any item in the file, a note may be inserted into the permanent file with their comments.

Officials of the State or County Health Department and the State Department of Education may have the right to review student files without the parents' or guardians' permission. However, with a written court order, other government officials may inspect the contents of a student's file without the Permission of the student parent/guardian. The school will inform the student and his family in writing that such an inspection has been requested or made.

A copy of the student's file may be sent to an outside professional, such as a psychologist or educational diagnostician, if requested in writing by the parent(s), guardian(s), or student if he/she has attained the age of majority, with notation of pertinent papers to be sent.

Section 7: Ground Rules

Fundamental Ground Rules

As a school founded on the Montessori ideals, we believe that every person deserves respect. Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom expects all members of our community to demonstrate kindness, courtesy and respect toward the school and fellow students, parents, teachers, and staff.

The goal of all Montessori education is to establish safe, warm, and caring environments within which we teach students positive and appropriate ways to handle situations, to develop a strong sense of self-discipline, responsibility and courtesy; to develop an atmosphere conducive to peaceful studies as well as the growth and development of each and every member of our community.

When anyone at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom finds it difficult to follow the school's expectations about interpersonal conduct, we will quickly bring the student, family, and staff together to work toward a solution.

We follow an approach based on empowerment, mutual respect and trust. Our disciplinary method is Redirecting Children's Behavior authored by Kathryn Kvoles. Neither corporal punishment, nor physical or emotional intimidation, is allowed at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom. If anyone consciously or flagrantly violates the social contract regarding safety, kindness and courtesy, our response is to identify the appropriate and natural consequences of their actions. For example, if something is broken, it must be replaced or repaired, preferably not by the parents alone, but by the student whose actions led to the damage.

Any student who repeatedly breaks the ground rules or who on even one occasion endangers the health and safety of others, may be suspended for a period of time or asked to leave the school.

We have worked together to create a system of ground rules and discipline that is firm, fair, and consistent in order to help students maintain the school's values and character. All students are expected to adhere and respect them to protect one another.

Our ground rules are essentially the same at every level of the school, although the language and emphasis changes somewhat for the older student. This is how we explain them to younger students. Please review these rules with your child:

- Be kind and gentle to one another.
- Everyone has a right to privacy and concentration. Please don't disturb anyone who is trying to concentrate on his or her work.
- Everyone has a right to his or her personal belongings. Please do not touch anything that is not yours without the owner's permission. If you accidentally lose or break something, please replace it without a fuss.
- Everyone here, both children and adults has the right to feel safe and secure. Please don't express anger or upset feelings in a way that insults or threatens someone else.
- Everyone here has the right to be physically safe. Please don't do anything that might hurt or endanger anyone.
- At Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom, no one is allowed to fight, push, trip, or use any other aggressive behavior.

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- Use the playground equipment as intended. For example, do not try to walk up the slides.
- Stop chasing or playing scary games when asked. Violent games are prohibited.
- Please don't tackle or trip one another in any games.
- Do not throw mulch.
- Do not leave your teacher's supervision without permission.
- Do not enter the parking lot or ever leave campus without an adult.
- Please do not roughhouse or play carelessly.
- Keep sticks and stones on the ground. Don't pick them up and never throw them.
- Please put all balls, ropes and other outdoor equipment away when you are finished playing with them.

Parents/guardian's must carefully monitor children when playing on the school grounds after school. They must follow all of the rules above.

Ground rules for Elementary students:

- Respect one another: We expect everyone at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom to treat everyone else in the school community-faculty, staff, students, and parents-with kindness and respect both in words and actions.
- Respect authority: We expect students to comply with teacher's directions. We further expect students to seek appropriate methods of appeal should they ever believe it to be necessary.
- Attendance at school: Students must attend each and every class daily (from beginning to end). They may not skip school, nor skip any class. "Excused" absences will be verified with the family.
- Please arrive at school promptly every day.
- Dress: We expect students to dress appropriately, and in good taste, within the dress code guidelines. On field trips and special events, please wear one of the Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom uniforms.
- Skate Boards and Roller Blades: Skate boards and roller blades are not allowed at school.
- Drugs and alcohol: Although we assume that it will never happen, as the school begins to extend through the higher grades it is important to be clear about our position. We expect our students to avoid all contact with drugs or alcohol. This is defined to include the use, possession or sale of any controlled substance (drugs) or alcoholic beverage. The possession, or sale of any alcohol or controlled substance, either during the school day or during any school-sponsored trip, party or function, may be immediate grounds for expulsion.
- Violence and Harassment: Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom cannot tolerate any irresponsible and dangerous behavior, acts of violence, threats of violence, emotional or sexual harassment, or verbal abuse directed toward anyone. It is absolutely illegal and forbidden to bring or carry a weapon to school or to use any common object as a weapon.

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- Smoking: Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom is a smoke-free environment. Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom will do everything in its power to discourage students from ever starting.
- Respect for the property of others: Any theft, vandalism or damages to property whether deliberate or accidental must be repaired or repaid.
- Care of the environment: The entire school community (teachers, students and administrators) is responsible for helping to maintain the order and cleanliness of the school environment.
- If something is spilled, please clean it up right away.
- Everyone is expected to help keep the school litter free by picking up any trash or belongings that you find strewn around. Do not throw trash on the ground, indoors or out.
- Students are expected to help with the daily clean up in their class areas.

Infractions of these ground rules will result in further disciplinary action.

Rules for Safety on Field Trips

Please be sure that you understand and can support the following basic safety rules. Safety is our prime concern, and we must insist that every student follow certain rules of safe and courteous conduct while being transported to our destination. Remember that all of the normal school rules apply on any field trip.

- Passengers must wear their seat belts at all times.
- Stay in your seat at all times while the vehicle is moving.
- Don't leave your seat to get off until the vehicle has come to a complete stop.
- For everyone's safety, do not shout; engage in horseplay or switch seats during the trip.
- Never stick your hand (or anything else) out of the vehicle window.
- Never throw anything out of the vehicle.
- Do not play with sharp objects, such as pens or pencils, on the vehicle.
- Do not eat or drink in the vehicle.
- Every student is expected to set a good example for the younger children. Watch your language and behavior. Do not curse, act foolishly or break any school rules.

Fire drills

The office will conduct random fire drills monthly.

- The alarm will be a special bell, which will ring continuously in the event of a fire or drill.
- While the bell rings continuously, all classes will dismiss into designated areas and remain in their groups.
- The teachers will make certain the room is empty and close the doors.
- The teachers will join the class outside the building, take role and notify the office of attendance.
- Students and teachers are expected to remain grouped in the designated area until informed that they may return to class.

Section 8: Financial Policies

Tuition Policies

Our school is completely dependent on tuition as its principal source of income. Student accounts must be kept up-to-date. The school will be forced to withhold all services to students whose accounts have fallen behind unless written arrangements have been made for deferred payment. Your cooperation is essential and very much appreciated. Parents are responsible for prompt payment of all outstanding tuition and fees. Report cards and transcripts will not be issued if a student has an outstanding balance on his or her account. They will be forwarded once the account has been brought up to date.

Tuition Payments are due on the 1st of each month. If you are mailing the payment, we ask that it be mailed so that it is received by the 1st of the month. If you are dropping payment off in person, please hand it into the front office at either site. If your tuition payment has not been received by the 10th of the month, you will be assessed a \$35 late charge which is due with your tuition payment immediately. If we have not received your payment by the 30th of the month and you have not communicated directly with the main office. Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom reserves the right to dismiss your child from school. If your school payment is continually late, we may withdraw your child from our enrollment. Late payment costs the school time and money that are best spent on the student's welfare. Any financial inquiries should be directed to the main office at each site. Alternatively, you may call Leslie Meldrum at 908-595-2900 ext 202 for accounts payable or Donna Fiumara at 908-369-4436 ext 202 for accounts receivable.

Financial Aid

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom provides limited aid to those parents who might need some temporary assistance for no more than one school year. Visit our website and proceed with the instructions on the financial aid program, FAST. *Please note that if you receive financial aid, you may not be late on payments or the aid will be revoked.*

Re-enrollment

Invitations to continue at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom are made by the administration and faculty, based on an annual review of each student's academic progress, social and emotional development, any special needs (if applicable), along with the attitudes and values expressed by the child and parents. As always, our goal is to help each child and family find the perfect match between the student, home, and school.

Re-enrollment material will be handed out approximately in February and is due back at the school within two weeks along with the annual registration deposit. If the school has not received a student's re-enrollment materials by the date in the calendar, his space will be made available to new students who have applied for admission to the school. *No student may re-enroll if there is an outstanding balance remaining on her account.*

Fundraising

Raritan Valley Montessori Academy is a non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization, holding approval as a 501-C3 corporation from the Federal Government. Voluntary contributions to Raritan Valley Montessori, where no goods or services are received in turn, are tax deductible as defined in the IRS guidelines. The Cherry Blossom is a for profit organization. Despite the superior education and care students receive at Raritan Valley Montessori & The Cherry Blossom and the cost to families of that education, tuition alone is insufficient to fund all expenses aimed at such excellence. Additional support, in time and money, is necessary to offer this quality of education. We ask that every family participate in volunteer service and fundraisers for the school. We need on-going support from the entire community for new development and projects throughout the school.

Section 9: Appendix

Questions for parents to ponder

What were the most important factors that led you to select a Montessori Education for your child?

What are the most important goals that you have for your child's education?

What skills, knowledge and attitudes do our children need to be prepared as adult for living in the 21st century?

In what way does Montessori provide our children with the skills, knowledge and attitudes that they will need to succeed in the real world?

The Outcomes of a Montessori Education

Studies comparing children attending Montessori schools with those enrolled in traditional programs have focused on the following educational outcomes. You may want to conduct your own little study by considering the children at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom.

How well does Montessori help students develop intrinsic motivation? What evidence of intrinsic motivation have you observed among Montessori students?

Intrinsic Motivation: Intrinsic motivation is the innate desire that drives the child to engage in an activity for enjoyment and satisfaction.

How well does Montessori help students develop the ability to accept external authority? What evidence of the ability to accept external authority have you observed among Montessori students?

Ability to Handle External Authority: The student is able to accept the ground rules established by external authority as appropriate boundaries in his or her interactions within the school community. These ground rules are internalized, enabling the student to function with or without the presence of the external authority.

How well does Montessori help students develop creativity and originality of thought? What evidence of creativity and originality of thought have you observed among Montessori students?

Creativity and Originality of Thought: Students are confident using the knowledge and skills they have acquired to express their own ideas and creativity. They recognize the value of their own ideas, respect the creative process of others and are willing to share regardless of risk. Students find joy and satisfaction in self-expression.

How well does Montessori help students develop social responsibility? What evidence of social responsibility have you observed among Montessori students?

Social Responsibility: Social responsibility requires the awareness that one's actions impact the welfare of the group and that one cannot attain complete independence and autonomy until one constructively in a group process. Individuals are able to make a positive contribution to their community and groups within that community.

How well does Montessori prepare students academically? What evidence of academic preparation have you observed among Montessori students?

Academic Preparation: Academic preparation entails providing students with skills that allow them to become independently functioning adults and life-long learners. As students master one level of academic skills they are able to go further and apply themselves to increasingly challenging materials across various academic disciplines. Students recognize that there is always room to grow in their abilities to read, write, speak and think clearly and thoughtfully. Children learn how to learn by doing-experiential learning. Students are encouraged to explore materials, integrate new concepts, analyze data and think critically. Academic skills are essential to learning and knowing, not the aim of learning and knowing.

How well does Montessori help students develop autonomy? What evidence of autonomy have you observed among Montessori students?

Autonomy: The autonomous child is self directed, composed and morally independent.

How well does Montessori help students develop confidence and competence? What evidence of confidence and competence have you observed among Montessori students?

Confidence and Competence: The confident and competent child perceives himself as being successful, has a realistic understanding of accomplishment and has the ability to learn from his mistakes.

Competence is the capability for success through taking risks, reflection and self-correction.

How well does Montessori help students develop spiritual awareness? What evidence of spiritual awareness have you observed among Montessori students?

Spiritual Awareness: Spiritual awareness is embodied in the child who is compassionate, empathetic and sensitive to the natural world and the human condition.

Basic Elements of the Montessori Approach By Tim Seldin, Publisher of “Tomorrow’s Child”

The Montessori Classroom

Montessori classrooms are bright, warm and inviting. They are filled with plants, animals, art, music, books, and interest centers filled with intriguing learning materials, fascinating mathematical models, maps, charts, fossils, historical artifacts, computers, scientific apparatus, perhaps a small natural science museum, and animals that the children are raising.

You will not find rows of desks in our classrooms. Montessori learning environments are set up to facilitate student discussion and stimulate collaborative learning. One glance and it is clear that our children feel comfortable and at home.

Students will typically be found scattered around the classroom, working alone or with one or two others. They will tend to become so involved in their work that we cannot help but be tremendously impressed by the peaceful atmosphere.

It may take a moment to spot the teachers within the classrooms. They will be found working with one or two children at a time, advising, presenting a new lesson or quietly observing the class at work.

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In her research, Dr. Montessori noted specific characteristics associated with the child's interests and abilities at each plane of development. She argued that a school carefully designed to meet the needs and interests of the child will work more effectively because it is consistent with basic principles of psychology. Rather than fight the laws of nature, Montessori suggested that we "follow the child" and allow our children to show us how to facilitate the development of their human potential.

This focus on the "whole child" led Montessori to develop a very different sort of school from the traditional adult-centered classroom. To emphasize this difference, she named her first school the "Casa dei Bambini" or the "Children's House."

There is something profound in her choice of words, for the Montessori classroom is not the domain of the adults in charge, but rather a carefully prepared environment designed to facilitate the development of the children's independence and sense of personal empowerment.

This is a true community of young children. They move freely within the rooms, selecting work that captures their interest, rather than passively participating in lessons and projects selected by the teachers.

In a very real sense, even the very youngest students take care of their own child-sized environment. When they are hungry, they prepare their own snack and drink. They go to the bathroom without assistance. When something spills, they help each other carefully clean things up. Parents are often amazed to see small children in Montessori classrooms cut raw fruits and vegetables, sweep and dust, carry pitchers of water, and pour liquids with barely a drop spilled. These little ones normally go about their work so calmly and purposely that it is clear to even the casual observer that this is their environment: The Children's House.

The Montessori classroom is commonly referred to as a prepared environment. This name reflects the care and attention that is given to creating a learning environment that will reinforce the children's independence and intellectual development.

Respect, Intelligence, and Independence

We know that young children are full and complete individuals in their own right. They deserve to be treated with the full and sincere respect that we would extend to their parents. Respect breeds respect and creates an atmosphere within which learning is tremendously facilitated.

Montessori schools believe very strongly that intelligence is not fixed at birth, nor is the potential anywhere near as limited, as it sometimes seems in traditional education.

Success in school is directly tied to the degree to which children believe that they are capable and independent human beings. If they knew the words, even very young children would ask: "Help me learn to do it for myself!"

By allowing children to develop a meaningful degree of independence and self-discipline, Montessori sets a pattern for a lifetime of good work habits and a sense of responsibility. Students are taught to take pride in doing things for themselves carefully and well.

Montessori Teaches Children to Think, Collaborate and Discover

Our program is designed to help each of our students discover and develop his or her unique talents and possibilities. We treat each as a unique individual learner. We know that no two students will learn at the same pace, nor will they necessarily learn best from the same teaching methods, and our goal is to be flexible and creative in addressing each student as a unique individual.

At Montessori, students and teachers learn to collaborate in the process of education rather than mindlessly compete. Our students discover their own innate abilities and develop a strong sense of independence, self-

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confidence and self-discipline. In an atmosphere in which children learn at their own pace and compete only against themselves, they learn not to be afraid of making mistakes. They quickly find that few things in life come easily, and they can try again without fear of embarrassment.

One way of thinking about the difference between our approach and one that is more traditional is to consider that while learning the right answers may get our children through school, learning how to become a life-long independent learner will take them anywhere! Our children are learning to think, observe, and reflect; not memorize and quickly forget.

Rather than present students with loads of right answers, their teachers ask the right questions and lead the children to discover the answers for themselves. Learning will become its own reward, and each success will fuel their desire to discover even more.

The Elementary students are encouraged to do their own research, analyze what they have found, and come to their own conclusions. The teachers encourage our children to think for themselves and become actively engaged in the learning process.

Freedom of Movement and Independently Chosen Work

Montessori children are free to move about, working alone or with others at will. They may select any activity and work with it as long as they wish, so long as they do not disturb anyone or damage anything, and so long as they put it back where it belongs when they are finished.

The Integrated Montessori Curriculum

Classrooms at Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom are organized into several curriculum areas, which include language arts (reading, literature, grammar, creative writing, spelling, and handwriting), mathematics and geometry, everyday living skills, sensory awareness exercises and puzzles, geography, history, science, art, music, and movement. Most rooms will include a classroom library. Each area is made up of one or more shelf units, cabinets, and display tables with a wide variety of materials on open display ready for use as the children select them.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's curriculum is organized into a spiral of integrated studies, rather than a traditional model in which the curriculum is compartmentalized into separate subjects, with given topics considered only once at a specific grade level. In the early years, lessons are introduced simply and concretely and are reintroduced several times over succeeding years at increasing degrees of abstraction and complexity.

The course of study uses an integrated thematic approach that ties the separate disciplines of the curriculum together into studies of the physical universe, the world of nature and the human experience.

Literature, the arts, history, social issues, political science, economics, science and the study of technology all complement one another. This integrated approach is one of Montessori's great strengths. As an example, when our students study Africa in world history, they will also read African folk tales in world literature, create African masks and make African block print tee-shirts in art, learn Swahili songs in music, and make hieroglyphic calendars in math, as well as study African animals in zoology.

Our mathematics curriculum follows a European model of unified mathematics through which students are introduced to concepts in algebra, geometry, mathematical logic, and statistics from the early years of their education, rather than waiting until high school as is normal in the United States.

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The same is true in our science curriculum weaving principles of physics, chemistry, the earth sciences, botany, and zoology together from the preschool years and up, with far greater emphasis on the sciences in general than is common in most American elementary curriculums.

Typical Class Size

A typical Montessori class is made up of twenty-one to twenty-eight children, representing a three-year age span, taught by a certified Montessori teacher and a trained assistant.

Parents often wonder if it would not be better to organize classes into smaller groups, but there is actually a great deal of research, thought, and successful experience behind this particular model. The key is to remember that in Montessori, the teacher is neither the center of attention nor the sole source of instruction. The children are learning on their own by independent discovery and from each other, as well as through lessons presented by the teacher. This approach allows the children to explore and learn independently as much as possible. The stimulation of older children and the encouragement of their peers fuel the process and all so often, the best teacher of a four-year-old is an older child rather than an adult. Children learn best from one another. We create classes to ensure that each child will have enough classmates of the same sex and age group, as well as the stimulation of the older children.

Montessori Classes Encompasses a three-year Age Span

Montessori classes are organized to encompass a three-year age span, which allows younger students to experience the daily stimulation of older role models, who in turn blossom in the responsibilities of leadership. Students not only learn “with” each other, but “from” each other. We find that most often the best tutor is a fellow student who is just a bit older.

Some parents worry that having younger children in the same class, as older ones will leave one group or the other short changed. They fear that the younger children will absorb the teachers’ time and attention, or that the importance of covering the Kindergarten curriculum for the five-year-olds will prevent teachers from giving the three and four-year-olds the emotional support and stimulation that they need. Both concerns are misguided.

Working in one class for two or three years allows students to develop a strong sense of community with their classmates and teachers. The age range also allows especially gifted children the stimulation of intellectual peers, without requiring that they skip a grade and feel emotionally out of place.

Each class is an essentially stable community, with only the oldest third moving on to the next level each year. At each level within a Montessori school the curriculum and methods are logical and consistent extensions of what has come before.

How Can Montessori Teachers Meet the Needs of So Many Different Children?

Montessori teachers play a very different role from those played by traditionally trained educators. While the stern disciplinarians of the past may be an endangered species, many traditional teachers are focused on maintaining order and on covering a pre-defined curriculum. Most see their role as dispensing facts and skills to complacent students.

The Montessori teacher’s role is that of a facilitator and guide. He or she is usually not the center of attention and will not normally spend much time working with the whole class at once. Her role centers on the preparation and organization of appropriate learning materials to meet the needs and interests of each child in the class.

The Montessori teacher has four primary goals: to awaken our children’s spirit and imagination, to encourage their normal desire for independence and high sense of self-esteem, to help them develop the kindness and self-discipline

that will allow them to become full members of society, and to help them learn how to observe, question, and explore ideas independently. The Montessori teacher is a coach, mentor and friend.

The teachers rarely present a lesson to more than one or two children at a time and limit them a quick, efficient presentation. The objective is to intrigue the children so that they will come back on their own to work with the materials. Lessons center on clear and simple information that is necessary for the children to be able to do the work on their own: the name of the material, its place on the shelf, the ground rules for its use, and some of the possibilities inherent within it.

The teachers closely monitor their students' progress, keeping the level of challenge high. Because they come to know the children so well, Montessori teachers can often use their own interests to enrich the curriculum and provide alternate avenues for accomplishment and success.

The Montessori Materials - A Road from the Concrete to the Abstract

The basis of our approach is the simple observation that children learn most effectively through direct experience and the process of investigation and discovery. In her studies of children's learning, Dr. Montessori noted that most children do not learn by memorizing what they hear from their teachers or read in a text, but rather from concrete experience and direct interaction with the environment. Asking a child to sit back and watch us perform a process or experiment is like asking a one-year-old not to put everything in his mouth. Children need to manipulate and explore everything that catches their interest. This led Montessori to emphasize the overriding importance of concrete learning apparatus and to the development of the Montessori materials for mathematics, sensory development, language, science, history, and geography.

The Montessori learning materials are not the method itself, but rather tools that we use to stimulate the child into logical thought and discovery. They are provocative and simple; each carefully designed to appeal to children at a given level of development.

Each material isolates and teaches one thing or is used to present one skill at a time, as the child is ready. Montessori carefully analyzed the skills and concepts involved in each subject and noted the sequence in which children most easily master them.

To facilitate the prepared order of the environment, the teacher arranges the materials on the shelf following their sequence in the curriculum flowchart. The materials are displayed on low open shelves that are easily accessible to even the youngest children. They are arranged to provide maximum eye appeal without clutter. Each has a specific place on the shelves, arranged from the upper-left-hand corner in sequence to the lower right. Materials are always arranged in sequence, from the most simple to the most complex, and from the most concrete to those that are the most abstract.

Preparing Tomorrow's Innovative Thinkers Today

In a world of rapid change and new discoveries, we can only guess at the skills that our children will need to succeed in the 21st century. Now, more than ever, the essential lesson is learning how to learn.

The most important years in our children's education are not high school and college, but, instead, their first twelve years of life. This is when their character and values, self-image, basic skills and knowledge, and appreciation for culture and the arts are formed.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom offers our children a wonderful academic education, along with an education of the heart that nurtures their self-confidence, personal creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

We offer them the most challenging academic program that they can handle in a course of study that includes the junior Great Books, creative writing, unified mathematics, geometry, pre-algebra, history, geography, economics,

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philosophy and ethics, computers, botany and zoology, the physical sciences, foreign language study, art, music, dance, and physical education.

We can see our children as they truly come to love learning and begin to discover their true potential as young men and women.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's goal is to nurture their intelligence and creativity, helping our child become renaissance individuals in the intellectual tradition of Thomas Jefferson, Buckminster Fuller and Maria Montessori.

Granted, this lies beyond the scope of traditional education, but then Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom has set out to become a rather unusual school. As families, we come to schools like Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom to give our children an outstanding preparation for high school, college and life.

Curriculum Scope and Sequence: Ages 3-12 *By Tim Seldin*

Today's rapid technological and social change makes it harder for us to understand and keep pace with the modern world. This has put schools under terrific pressure to reevaluate what should be taught in an age when no one can predict the skills that our children will need when they reach maturity.

In the past, when our store of knowledge was relatively fixed and limited, the most efficient education consisted of lecture, drill and memorization.

In an era of technological revolution and social change, the foundation of a good education is to learn how to learn.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's course of study encompasses the full substance of the traditional curriculum and goes beyond to teach students how to think clearly, do their own research, express themselves well in writing and speech, and to put their knowledge to practical application.

We have organized our course of study as an inclined spiral plane of integrated studies, rather than a traditional model in which the curriculum is compartmentalized into separate subjects, with given topics considered only once at a given grade level. At Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom, lessons are introduced simply and concretely in the early years and are reintroduced several times during the following years at increasing degrees of abstraction and complexity.

Our course of study is an integrated thematic approach that ties the separate disciplines of the curriculum together into studies of the physical universe, the world of nature and the human experience. This integrated approach is one of Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's great strengths. As an example, when our students study the ancient Greeks in world history, they also read Homer and Bullfinch's Mythology. Literature, the arts, history, social issues, government, economics, architecture, medicine, science and the study of technology all complement one another in our curriculum.

Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom is a college preparatory school with a rigorous, yet innovative, academic program. Although we offer a warm, supportive academic atmosphere, we set a high level of expectation for the quality of thought, work, and mastery of content and skills.

As children reach the elementary years, they will be challenged to pursue a considerable amount of library and field research both in and outside of school. In preparation for college, we consciously teach students how to develop effective work habits and test-taking strategies.

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The following is a brief overview of Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom's core curriculum in the areas of language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, sensory training, and practical life for our students age 3 through the upper elementary level. Please keep in mind that this only represents an overview of the course of study, and is not meant to be complete. Since our students progress at their own pace, it is not possible to divide up the curriculum by grade levels. In addition, we have not attempted, for lack of space, to include descriptions of our curriculum in the arts, music, physical education and foreign language.

Reading and Language Arts

Pre-Reading

Due to our multi-age classroom design, our youngest students are constantly exposed to the older children in the class who are already reading. The total environment of the Primary classes (3 to 6 years old) tends to create and reinforce in our young children a spontaneous interest in learning how to read. We begin to teach reading as soon as that interest is first expressed.

- Using a total immersion approach, we help the youngest children to develop a highly sophisticated vocabulary and command of the language.
- The children are taught through many early approaches to listen for and recognize the individual phonetic sounds in words.
- We introduce the children to literature by reading aloud and discussing a wide range of classic stories and poetry.
- We help our youngest students to recognize the shape and phonetic sounds of the alphabet through the "sandpaper letters:" a tactile alphabet.

Reading

- The development of the concept that written words are actual thoughts set down on paper. (This takes children much longer than most people realize.)
- Sounding out simple three or four-letter phonetic words. (Typically before age 5)
- Early exercises to practice reading and to gain the concept of a noun: labeling objects with written name tags, mastering increasingly complex words naming things that interest them, such as dinosaurs, the parts of a flower, geometric shapes, the materials in the classroom, etc.
- Learning to recognize verbs: normally exercises in which the child reads a card with a verbal "command" printed out (such as run, sit, walk, etc.) and demonstrates his understanding by acting it out. As the child's reading vocabulary increases, verbal commands involve full sentences and multiple steps: "Place the mat on the table and bring back a red pencil."
- Reading specially selected or prepared small books on topics that really interest the child such as in science, geography, nature or history.
- Interpretive reading comprehension at ever increasing levels of difficulty, beginning in the early elementary grades and continuing until high school graduation.
- Use of the library and reference books on a daily basis for both research and pleasure.
- An introduction to the world's classical children's literature at increasing depth and sophistication.

Handwriting

Control of the hand in preparation for writing is developed through many exercises, including specially designed tasks in the use of the pencil. Such exercises begin with very young children and extend over several years so that mastery is gradually, but thoroughly, attained.

The young children practice making letters from the time of their first initial “explosion into writing” at age 3 or 4:

Moveable Alphabets’ made up of easily manipulated plastic letters are used for the early stages of phonetic word creation, the analysis of words, and spelling. They facilitate early, reading and writing tasks during the period when young children are still not comfortable with their own writing skills. Even before the children are comfortable in their handwriting skills, they spell words, compose sentences and stories and work on punctuation and capitalization with the moveable alphabets (Age 4-6).

- At first, by tracing letters into sand.
- Later, by writing on special tilted, upright blackboards: unlined, wide-lined and narrow-lined.
- Later, by writing on special writing tablets, becoming comfortable with script.
- Cursive writing (Typically around age 5)
- Word Processing (Normally beginning around age 6)
- Calligraphy (Whenever the child is interested, often around age 10.)

Composition

At an early age, before handwriting has been mastered, the children compose sentences, stories and poetry through oral dictation to adults and with the use of the moveable alphabet. Once handwriting is fairly accomplished, the children begin to develop their composition skills. They continue to develop over the years at increasing levels of sophistication.

- Preparing written answers to simple questions.
- Composing stories to follow a picture series.
- Beginning to write stories or poems on given simple themes.
- Preparing written descriptions of science experiments.
- Preparing written reports.
- Learning how to write letters.
- By age 9, research skills and the preparation of reports become major components of the educational program at Raritan Valley Montessori. Students research areas of interest or topics that have been assigned in depth, and prepare formal and informal, written and oral reports.

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- Creative and expository composition skills continue to develop as the children advance from level to level. Students are typically, asked to write on a daily basis, composing short stories, poems, plays, reports, and articles.

Spelling

Children begin to spell using the moveable alphabet to sound out and spell words as they are first learning to read. They ‘take dictation’ -- spelling words called for by the teacher - as a daily exercise. The sequence of spelling, as with all language skills, begins much earlier than is traditional in this country, during a time when children are spontaneously interested in language. It continues throughout their education.

- Learning to sound out and spell simple phonetic words.
- Learning to recognize and spell words involving phonograms, such as ei, ai or ough.
- Developing a first “personal” dictionary of words they can now spell.
- Learning to recognize and spell the “puzzle words” of English: words that are non-phonetic and are not spelled as they sound.
- Studying words: involving compound words, contractions, singular-plural, masculine-feminine words, prefixes, suffixes, synonyms, antonyms, homonyms.

Grammar

The study of grammar begins almost immediately after the child begins to read, during the sensitive period when he is spontaneously interested in language. It continues over several years until mastered. The idea is to introduce grammar to the young child as she is first learning how to put thoughts down on paper, when the process is natural and interesting, rather than waiting until the student is much older and finds the work tedious.

- We introduce our children to the function of the parts of speech one at a time through many games and exercises that isolate the one element under study. Montessori has assigned a geometric symbol to represent each element of grammar. (For example, a large red circle represents verbs.) The children analyze sentences by placing the symbols for the appropriate part of speech over each word.
- Once students have mastered the concrete symbols for the parts of speech, they perform exercises that are more advanced or several years with grammar boxes set up to allow them to analyze sentences by their parts of speech.
- Sentence analysis: simple and compound sentences, clauses, verb voices, and logical analysis of all sorts of sentences are studied using many different concrete materials and exercises. This normally begins about age 5 and continues over several years.
- Students continue their study of language from the mid-elementary years onward, reviewing as well as engaging new concepts and skills: tenses, moods, irregular verbs, person and number, the study of style, the study of grammatical arrangements in other languages.

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Mathematics

- Our students are typically introduced to numbers at age 3: learning the numbers and number symbols one to ten: the red and blue rods, sandpaper numerals, association of number rods and numerals, spindle boxes, cards and counters, counting, sight recognition, concept of odd and even.
- Introduction to the decimal system typically begins at age 3 or 4. Units, tens, hundreds, thousands are represented by specially prepared concrete learning materials that show the decimal hierarchy in three dimensional form: units = single beads, tens = 1 bar of 10 units, hundreds = 10 ten bars fastened together into a square, thousands = a cube ten units long, ten units wide and ten units high. The children learn to first recognize the quantities, then to form numbers with the bead or cube materials through 9,999 and to read them back, to read and write numerals up to 9,999, and to exchange equivalent quantities of units for tens, tens for hundreds, etc.
- Linear Counting: learning the number facts to ten (what numbers make ten, basic addition up to ten); learning the teens ($11 = \text{one ten} + \text{one unit}$), counting by tens ($34 = \text{three tens} + \text{four units}$) to one hundred.
- Development of the concept of the four basic mathematical operations: addition, subtraction, division and multiplication through work with the Montessori Golden Bead Material. The child builds numbers with the bead material and performs mathematical operations concretely. (This process normally begins by age 4 and extends over the next two or three years.) Work with this material over a long period is critical to the full understanding of abstract mathematics for all but a few exceptional children. This process tends to develop in the child a much deeper understanding of mathematics.
- Developing of the concept of “dynamic” addition and subtraction through the manipulation of the concrete math materials. (Addition and subtraction where exchanging and regrouping of numbers is necessary.)
- Memorization of the basic math facts: adding and subtracting numbers under 10 without the aid of the concrete materials. (Typically begins at age 5 and is normally completed by age 7.)
- Development of further abstract understanding of addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication with large numbers through the Stamp Game (a manipulative system that represents the decimal system as color-keyed “stamps”) and the Small and Large Bead Frames (color-coded abacuses).
- Skip counting with the chains of the squares of the numbers from zero to ten: i.e., counting to 25 by 5’s, to 36 by 6’s, etc. (Age 5-6) Developing first understanding of the concept of the “square” of a number.
- Skip counting with the chains of the cubes of the numbers zero to ten: i.e., counting to 1,000 by ones or tens. Developing the first understanding of the concept of a “cube” of a number.
- Beginning the “passage to abstraction,” the child begins to solve problems with paper and pencil while working with the concrete materials. Eventually, the materials are no longer needed.
- Development of the concept of long multiplication and division through concrete work with the bead and cube materials. (The child is typically 6 or younger, and cannot yet do such problems on paper without the concrete materials. The objective is to develop the concept first.)
- Development of more abstract understanding of “short” division through more advanced manipulative materials (Division Board), movement to paper and pencil problems, and memorization of basic division facts. (Normally by age 7-8)

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- Developments of still more abstract understanding of “long” multiplication through highly advanced and manipulative materials (the Multiplication Checkerboard). (Usually age 7-8)
- Developments of still more abstract understanding of “long division” through highly advanced manipulative materials (Test Tube Division apparatus). (Typically, by age 7-8)
- Solving problems involving parentheses, such as $(3 \times 4) - (2 + 9) = ?$
- Missing sign problems: In a given situation, should you add, divide, multiply or subtract?
- Introduction to problems involving tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, and millions (Normally by age 7.)
- Study of fractions: Normally begins when children using the short division materials who find that they have a “remainder” of one and ask whether or not the single unit can be divided further. The study of fractions begins with very concrete materials (the fraction circles), and involves learning names, symbols, equivalency common denominators and simple addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication of fractions up to “tenths.” (Normally by age 7-8)
- Study of decimal fractions: all four mathematical operations. (Normally begins by age 8-9, and continues for about two years until the child totally grasps the ideas and processes.)
- Practical application problems, which are used to some extent from the beginning, become far more important around age 7-8 and afterward. Solving word problems and determining arithmetic procedures in real situations becomes a major focus.
- Money: units, history, equivalent sums, foreign currencies (units and exchange). (Begins as part of social studies and applied math by age 6.)
- Interest: concrete to abstract; real life problems involving credit cards and loans; principal, rate, time.
- Computing the squares and cubes of numbers: cubes and squares of binomials and trinomials. (Normally by age 10)
- Calculating square and cube roots: from concrete to abstract. (Normally by age 10 or 11)
- The history of mathematics and its application in science, engineering, technology and economics.
- Reinforcing application of all mathematical skills to practical problems around the school and in everyday life.
- Basic data gathering graph reading, preparation and statistical analysis.

Geometry

- Sensorial exploration of plane and solid figures at the Primary level (Ages 3 to 6): the children learn to recognize the names and basic shapes of plane and solid geometry through manipulation of special wooden geometric insets. They then learn to order them by size or degree.
- Stage I: Basic geometric shapes. (Age 3-4)

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- Stage II: More advanced plane geometric shapes-triangles, polygons, various rectangles and irregular forms. (Age 3-4)
- Stage III: Introduction to solid geometric forms and their relationship to plane geometric shapes. (Age 2-5)
- Study of the basic properties and definitions of the geometric shapes. This is essentially as much a reading exercise as mathematics since the definitions is part of the early language materials.
- More advanced study of the nomenclature, characteristics, measurement and drawing of the geometric shapes and concepts such as points, line, angle, surface, solid, properties of triangles, circles, etc. (Continues through age 12 in repeated cycles.)
- Congruence, similarity, equality, and equivalence.
- The history of applications of geometry.
- The theorem of Pythagoras.
- The calculation of area and volume.

Geography

Physical Geography

- The Primary Globes (Age 3-5): specially prepared for the very young child that isolate single concepts of globe study – how land and water are shown, and the corresponding shapes of the continents that they learned from the puzzle maps.
- The Puzzle Maps (Age 3-7): These are specially made maps in the forms of intricate, color-coded, wooden jigsaw puzzles representing the continent, the countries of each continent, and the states of the U.S. They are presented to the children at an early age, and are at first enjoyed simply as challenging puzzles. Soon, however, the children begin to learn the names of given countries, and by age 6 are normally very familiar with the continents of the globe, the nations of North America, South America and Europe along with most of the states of the U.S. As soon as the children can read, they begin to lay the puzzle pieces out and place the appropriate name labels to each as a reading and geography exercise.
- Land and Water Formations: materials designed to help the very young child understand basic land and water formations such as island, isthmus, peninsula, strait, lake, cape, bay, archipelago, etc. At first, they are represented by three-dimensional models of each, complete with water. Then the children learn to recognize the shapes on maps, and learn about famous examples of each.
- Transference to maps: Introduction to written names and various forms of maps, along with early study of the flora, fauna, landscapes and people of the continents.
- Maps and compass: Introduction to longitude and latitude, coordinate position on the globe, the Earth's poles, the magnetic poles, history and use of the compass, topographic maps, global positioning satellite devices, electronic charts.
- An introduction to humankind's search to understand how the Earth was formed, from creation stories to the evidence of contemporary scientific research: origins, geologic forces, formations of the oceans and

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atmosphere, continental drift and tectonic plates, volcanoes, earth quakes, the ice ages and the formation of mountain ranges. (Age 6)

- The study of coasts and land reliefs: hills, mountain ranges, volcanoes, valleys, plains, etc., their formation, animal life, and effect on people.
- The study of the hydrosphere: ocean, rivers, lakes, the water cycle. (By age 8)

Cultural Geography

- Countries are studied in many ways at all levels of Raritan Valley Montessori, beginning at about age 3-4. A number of festivals are held every year to focus on specific cultures and to celebrate life together: an example being Chinese New Year, then the entire school might study China, prepare Chinese food, learn Chinese dances, and participate in a special dragon dance parade. Anything that the children find interesting is used to help them become familiar with the countries of the world: flags, boundaries, food, climate, traditional dress, houses, major cities, children's toys and games, stamps, coins, traditional food, art, music, and history. *This interweaves through the entire curriculum.*
- Study of the regions, culture, and natural resources of the United States, including geography, climate, flora and fauna, major rivers and lakes, capitals, important cities, mountains, people, regional foods, traditions, etc. This begins at age 5 and continues at increasing depth at each level.
- The detailed study of one nation at a time. Focus moves over the years from one continent to another, as the children's interest leads them. All aspects of the nation are considered: geography, climate, flora and fauna, major rivers and lakes, cities, mountains, people, food, religions, etc.

Economic Geography

- Natural Resources of the Earth.
- Production: How humankind uses natural resources.
- Imports and Exports: The interdependence of nations.

History and the needs all people share

- The basic needs of man are food, shelter, clothing, defense, transportation, culture, law, religion or spiritual enlightenment, love, and adornment. (This study begins throughout the curriculum.)
- The concept of time and historical time is developed through many activities and repeated at deeper complexity from age 5:
 - Telling time on the clock
 - Timelines of the child's life
 - Timelines the activities of a day, week, month, year
 - Family trees
 - Timeline of the Earth's history
 - Timeline from 8,000 BC to 2,000 AD to study ancient to modern history

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- The story of the evolution of the planet and its life forms over the eons is first studied at about age 6, along with an overview of human history. This is repeated throughout the curriculum in increasing depth of study.
- Each year the child continues to study and analyze the needs, culture, technology and social history of various periods in history. The trends of human achievement are charted, such as the development of transportation, architecture, great inventions, and great leaders.
- By age 8, students begin to study the earliest humans, ending with an introduction to the first farmers. They consider early societies in terms of how they organized themselves to meet the common needs of all peoples: food, clothing, shelter, defense, transportation, medicine, arts, entertainment, government and religion.
- The Upper Elementary level (ages 9-12) history program follows a three year cycle of thematic study. Students study whichever themes are being presented that year regardless of their age. In year 1 of the cycle, the class will focus on the creation of the universe, formation of the earth, evolution of life, and early human civilizations. These topics were first introduced at the lower elementary level. At this level, students will go into considerably greater depth and prepare increasingly sophisticated projects and research reports.
- Continuing the three-year cycle of thematic history study at the Upper Elementary level (ages 9-12), in year 2 of the cycle, the class will focus on ancient civilizations, including the Mesopotamian cultures, Greece, Rome, ancient China, Byzantium, ending with an introduction to the Middle Ages.
- In the third year of the three-year cycle of, Upper Elementary level (ages 9-12), the class will focus on American studies, including an introduction to the history of the United States, American folk culture, technology, children's literature, government and geography. The class will also consider Pre-Colombian Central and South American cultures, the Native American peoples of North America, the age of exploration, and the immigrant cultural groups who came to America from Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Science

- Differentiation between living and non-living things. (Age 3-4)
- Differentiation between animals and plants; basic characteristics (Age 3-5)
- First puzzles representing the biological parts of flowers, root systems and trees, along with the anatomical features of common animals. These are first used by very young children and puzzles, then as a means to learn the vocabulary, then are related to photos and/or the "real thing," then traced onto paper, and finally with labels as a reading experience.
- Nomenclature Cards:
 - Botany: identifying, naming and labeling the parts of plants, trees, leaves, roots and flowers.
 - Zoology: identifying, naming and labeling the external parts of human beings, insects, fish, birds and other animals.

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- Introduction of the families of the animal kingdom, and identification and classification of animals into the broad families. Introduction to the basic characteristics, life-styles, habitats, and means of caring for young of each family in the animal kingdom. (Age 5-7)
- Introduction to ecology: habitat, food chain, adaptation to environment and climate, predator-prey relationships, camouflage and other body adaptations of common animals.
- Advanced elementary biology study: the names and functions of different forms of leaves, flowers, seeds, trees, plants, and animals. This usually begins with considerably more fieldwork collecting specimens or observing.
- Study of evolution and the development of life on the Earth over the eons. (Age 6 and up)
- Study of the internal parts of vertebrates: limbs, body coverings, lungs, heart, skeleton, reproduction. (Age 5-8)
- Advanced study of plants in class, greenhouse and garden: experimenting with soil, nutrients, light, etc. (Age 6 and up)
- More advanced study of the animal kingdom: classification by class and phyla. (Age 7 and up)
- The plant kingdom: Study of the major families of plant life on the Earth and classification by class and phyla. (Age 7 and up)
- Life cycles; water, oxygen, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen. (Age 7 and up)
- Introduction to chemistry: Begins at age 6 and continues throughout the elementary science curriculum
 - The three states of matter
 - Basic atomic theory
 - How elements are created through stellar fusion
 - Elements and compounds
 - Mendelov's table of the elements
 - Basic molecular theory: Building atomic models
 - Physical and chemical changes
 - Research into the elements and continued study of the periodic table
 - Introduction to chemistry lab experiments
- Animal behavior: detailed observation. (Age 9 and up)
- Anatomy: Systems of the animal and human body. (Age 9 and up)
- Health and nutrition. (Age 9 and up)
- Ecology: Advanced study of the interrelationships of life forms. (Age 9 and up)
- Development of skills in careful observation, recording and describing and use of increasingly sophisticated techniques of measurement.
- Development of skills using common scientific apparatus: microscopes, telescopes, hand lens, collecting field specimens, dissecting, preparing displays.

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- Development of field science skills: tracking, listening, observing.
- Development of scientific inquiry skills: forming hypothesis, designing experiments, recording results.
- Study of the great inventions, machines and technology and their effect on society throughout history.
- Study of the great scientists.
- Introduction to the physical sciences: (Age 10-12)
 - Geology and mineralogy
 - Meteorology
 - Astronomy and cosmology
 - Elementary physics: light, electricity, magnetic fields, gravity, mass.
- Preparing and analyzing all sorts of graphs and data displays as well as basic statistics.

Practical Life Skills

One of the first goals of Raritan Valley Montessori/The Cherry Blossom is to develop in the very young child a strong and realistic sense of independence and self-reliance. Along with love and a stable environment, this is the child's greatest need. This area of the curriculum focuses on developing skills that allow the child to effectively control and deal with the social and physical environment in which he lives. There is a growing pride in being able to do it for me. "Practical life begins as soon as the young child enters the school and continues throughout the curriculum to more and more advanced tasks appropriate to the oldest students."

Early Tasks (Age 3-5)

- Dressing oneself
- Learning home addresses and phone numbers
- Pouring liquids without spilling
- Carrying objects without dropping
- Carrying liquids without spilling
- Walking without knocking into furniture or people
- Using knives and scissors with good control
- Using simple carpentry tools
- Putting materials away on the shelves where they belong when finished
- Working carefully and neatly
- Dusting, polishing and washing just about anything: floors, tables, silver
- Sweeping and vacuuming floors and rugs
- Flower arranging
- Caring for plants and animals
- Table setting - serving yourself - table manners
- Folding cloth: napkins, towels, etc.
- Simple use of needle and thread
- Using common household tools: tweezers, tongs, eyedroppers, locks, scissors, knives
- Increasingly precise eye-hand coordination
- Simple cooking and food preparation
- Dish washing
- Weaving, bead stringing, etc.

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This process continues logically so that older students will learn such practical tasks as:

- Caring for animals
- Dog training
- Sewing
- Cooking complex meals
- Working with tools
- Making simple repairs
- Basic auto maintenance
- Getting around on their own: Metro, buses, cabs, hiking
- Completing tax forms
- Making consumer purchase decisions, comparison shopping, budgeting
- Maintaining a checkbook
- Applying for a job
- Earning spending money
- Mastering test taking strategies
- Caring for young children
- Interior decorating
- Making clothes
- Furniture remodeling
- Wilderness survival
- Running a small business enterprise
- Gardening

Sensory Training

These exercises in perception, observation, fine discrimination and classification play a major role in helping our children to develop their sense of logic and concentration. They begin at age 3 and are a major area of concentration typically through age 5.

- Discrimination of length, width and height
- Discrimination of volume
- Discrimination in multiple dimensions
- Discrimination among color tones
- Discrimination among geometric shapes for shape and relative size
- Discrimination among solid geometric shapes by sight and touch
- Solving of complex abstract puzzles in three dimensions
- Discrimination of intensity and nature of sounds
- Discrimination among musical tones
- Discrimination of texture by touch
- Discrimination of weight by touch
- Discrimination of temperature by touch
- Discrimination of scents

This, in the older students, lead to such exercises as:

- Precise observation of the natural world
- Culinary discrimination
- Artistic appreciation
- Architectural appreciation
- Musical appreciation