



Parent Handbook

2011-2012

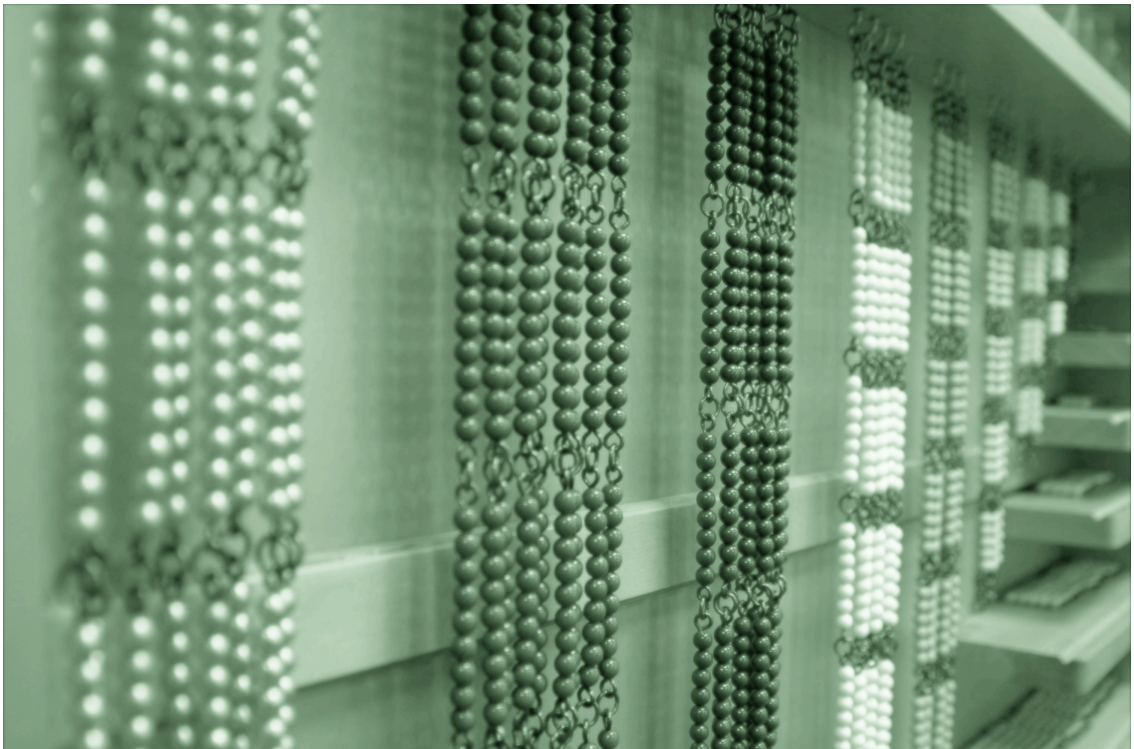


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School hours

The Montessori School classrooms will be open to students at 8:15 a.m. The school cannot be responsible for students who arrive at school earlier than 8:15 a.m. unless they are enrolled in the After School Program (see After School Program). Please have students in class by 8:30 a.m. Students who arrive after 8:30 a.m. must enter the class quietly without disruption to the teacher or other children. The school day will run until 3:15 p.m. Students will be expected to stay until class is dismissed. (See attendance for additional information)

Picking your child up early:

There will be occasions where you will need to take your child out of school early for a doctor's appointment or similar obligation. To ensure that your child will be ready, please send in a note to the teachers letting them know the time you will be picking him/her up.

Saying Good-bye - Tips For Montessori Parents On Separation:

Initially, 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. The prolonged good-bye often makes the separation more difficult. Feel free to call the school for reassurance that your child has settled in and is adjusting well. In the first few days some children will handle separation well, then experience separation anxiety several days later. This is very common and may happen.

Morning Arrival

Parents should park in the spaces provided and bring the children to class.

Dropping Off or Picking Up Students:

1. The school driveway can accommodate only one-way traffic.
2. Students may be brought to school between 8:15 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. Any child that must be dropped off before 8:15 a.m. must be taken to the After School Program morning program (see After School Program). There will be a nominal charge for this service.
3. For safety reasons, always keep your children by your side. Never allow them to run ahead, especially into the parking lot.

Attendance

All Abner students enrolled in primary and elementary, are expected to attend school on a daily basis, arriving before the start of the school day.

Even though Abner is less formal and more flexible than many schools, consistent attendance and prompt arrival are still essential. Students are expected to be in class by 8:30 a.m. and to be present in class for the full school day and at other required school activities.

Late arrival is disruptive and inconsiderate to the rest of the class, and few things are more disruptive to a child's education than irregular attendance. Consistency and routine are important to every child's development. We depend on your family's full support in this area.

Dismissal

Afternoon 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.

Authorized Pick-Up:

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 school friends. We may require and photocopy 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.

The normal school day will end at 3:15 p.m. for all students. Parents who have not picked up their child(ren) by 3:30 p.m. will have to pick them up from the After School Program. The school cannot be responsible for students after 3:30 p.m. unless they are enrolled in the After School Program.

After School Program

The After School Program is a separate program from Abner Montessori. Please do not make After School Program payments to Abner. Hours are from 3:15 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. Any students not enrolled in the After School Program who stay after 3:30 must enroll in the After School Program.

Please keep in mind for us to maintain our student/staff ratios in the After School Program, we cannot always accommodate unexpected students. Parents who do not have their child(ren) enrolled for full time aftercare need to contact the office by noon to ask if the staff can accommodate their child(ren) after school.

The After School Program ends at 6:15 p.m. at which time the facility closes for the day. It is essential that all children be picked up by this time. (A late fee will be assessed should any child not be picked up by 6:15 p.m.)

Separate enrollment forms for students attending the After School Program is required.

To bring your child in, park in the lot and walk up to the building for the appropriate supervision group. Please make contact with the staff member supervising your child before leaving him/her with the group. All children must be signed in.

To pick your child up in the afternoon, park in the lot and walk up to the building for the appropriate supervision group. All children must be signed out.

Please don't forget that we cannot allow your child to leave campus with anyone who is not on your dismissal form unless you give your written permission.

Attendance Tracking

The following procedures are used to track our children throughout their time at Abner Montessori School/After School Program. In the morning, parents must sign in their child on our attendance forms before leaving their child. Teachers will then maintain a class roll at the start of the school day. Children will be dismissed from Abner Montessori School at 3:15. Parents must sign the child out before leaving. Children requiring after school care will be checked into the After School Program as they enter the building. Parents may pick up their child from the front or gym lobbies. All children must be signed out.

School-age children riding the After School bus from Chapin or Lake Murray Elementary Schools will be checked in by the driver as they board the bus. Children will then be checked into the Program upon arrival at the facility. Parents may pick up their child from the front or gym lobbies. All children must be signed out.

Storm Closings

Severe Weather Dismissal:

If severe weather conditions make travel hazardous, school may be postponed, closed early, or cancelled. Abner makes this decision independently of the Lexington County Public School system. The decision will be announced on one or all of the following TV channel 10 and web site.

The First Day

On the first day of school, please don't linger too long in the classroom or react with alarm if your child is hesitant about the separation. It is very important to reassure him/her about where you will be during the day, and by what time you will pick him/her up in the afternoon. Some children may be sad for a little while during the first few days, but kind words and reassurance usually alleviates their fears. The teachers are wonderful in helping children through these situations. Children react differently to the same situation. Please, do not compare one child's behavior to another. Children may cope by changing their eating and sleeping schedule. Please be flexible with your child's schedule. It may be beneficial for your child to take prolonged baths at night to help them relax.

School Dress Code

Students are expected to dress in outfits that are neat, clean, comfortable, and appropriate for school. Younger children should dress in clothing that they can put on and fasten for themselves: pullover shirts, elastic waistbands, Velcro sneakers, etc. Young children usually cannot manage the shoulder fasteners found on overalls. Sneakers are required for jungle gym.

Please do not allow your child to come in wearing:

- Cut-off shorts
- Clothing with holes or tears
- Outfits with bare midriffs
- Hats inside the school buildings
- Oversized pants or shorts

- Over-sized shirts hanging down over their shorts, pants, or skirts
- Shorts and skirts should come no higher than mid-thigh
- Shoes with cleats

School Supplies

On the first day of class, please be sure your child brings to class:

- an extra set of clothing, including socks, to be kept at school during the year, held in a one-gallon zip-lock bag labeled with your child's name (please make sure clothing is weather appropriate)
- a light blanket and small pillow for children who nap

Show and Tell

Each class schedules a time for Show and Tell. Your child's teachers will inform you of their policy. Children enjoy bringing in an item from nature, a special souvenir from a trip, something they have made, or their favorite books.

Lost and Found

A lost and found area is maintained. If you are missing something, please check with us as soon as you can. We will clean out the box from time to time throughout the year.

Lunch

The Abner community places great emphasis on the importance of good nutrition as the first step to a lifelong wellness education program. Abner provides a nutritious, well-balanced lunch available to all students. Menus are posted for consideration outside your child's class and at the front desk on a weekly basis. Lunch is a very important part of your child's school day. If your child is allergic to any food or beverage, it is very important that you inform your child's teacher and fill out an allergy form during registration.

Packed Lunches

If your child will not eat the lunch provided, we ask that you send a well-balanced meal in a lunch box, clearly labeled with his/her name and instructions on heating, if necessary. Obvi-

ously, we all want to pack lunches that our children will eat. The challenge is to help them discover that wholesome, nutritious foods can taste even better than junk food and don't have the negative effects on our bodies.

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 your child in with sugary desserts or drinks. Please, NO SODAS! We will be happy to provide milk or water for your child.

Snacks

Montessori students and toddlers have nutritional snacks in the mornings and afternoons. We also have many food preparation lessons that include fruit, veggies, cheese, etc. We serve milk, fruit juice, and water. If you would like to send a snack, for a special occasion, please keep it healthy.

Special Dietary Restrictions

Some students may follow a special diet for religious or medical reasons. 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.

Field trips

Classes will periodically take field trips to local points of interest during the year. They are planned to coordinate with subjects being studied by a class or to take advantage of special community events. Notices of upcoming events will be sent home in advance. Parents are welcome to join the class in these activities. If you are interested, please speak with your child's teachers.

Parents will always be notified of any trips scheduled for your child's class. Students are always well supervised, however, parent volunteers may help chaperone. Field trips will always be preceded by notification and will require a permission slip and emergency contact information.

Here are a few of our rules regarding field trips:

- No flip-flops.
- The appropriate Abner t-shirt or color specified shirt is to be worn.
- At times, a lunch will be provided during the trip. Please make note of what this lunch will consist of and if your child does not eat what is being provided, we ask that you please provide a lunch for him/her.

Birthdays/Celebrations

Children love to celebrate their birthdays with their friends. It is especially nice to send in a special snack in honor of your child's birthday. Once again, please keep it healthy. At Abner we have a special birthday ceremony, the "Celebration of Life", in which we, or the parent(s)/child, tell the class the story of the child's life. Specific instructions and dates can be obtained from your child's teacher on this event.

General celebration of life instructions:

The CELEBRATION OF LIFE is a wonderful way to celebrate a birthday by honoring a child's life and accomplishments. A few days before your child's birthday you will be given a set of picture frames. Please put one birth photo, one at 1-year-old, one at 2 years old, etc., in the appropriate frames. The story of your child's life will be read during the celebration. The following is a sample story. Please let your child participate in selecting pictures and writing his or her life story.

THE STORY OF _____

_____ was born on _____ in _____ (city and state). He/she had to be held and taken care of all the time, couldn't talk to tell mom or dad what was needed, had to wear diapers, drank lots of milk and slept most of the time. By 6 months _____ could sit up all by his/herself and

(pause for the song)

When _____ was 1 year old, he/she learned to walk with help, play with toys,etc..... and could use two or three words to ask for what he/she needed.

(pause for the song)

At 2 years old, _____ learned to use the potty! etc. His/her favorite things were.....

(pause for the song)

When _____ was 3 years old, he/she came to our Montessori school. He/she could talk in whole sentences, run, ride a tricycle, and loved doing _____ work. At home, he/she helped by (Continue to child's present age).

And now, _____ is _____ years old! He/she can all by his/herself! His/her favorite color is _____, favorite food is _____, favorite thing to do is etc.

The celebration is performed with all students sitting in a circle in the classroom. A candle is lit to represent the moment of birth. The child walks once around the circle to represent each year of his/her life. The children sing “The earth goes round the sun” and a candle is lit each time he/she walks around the sun while the story is read. The children give one clap of each year of the child’s life. This is followed by making a silent wish, blowing out the candles, and singing Happy Birthday.

At the end of the celebration the child may serve a special treat. Please bring a treat that is easy to pass and eat because it is served on the circle. Some suggestions for healthy treats are: pretzels, corn chips, goldfish crackers, oatmeal or chocolate chip cookies, fruit, rice crispy treats, crackers and cheese, pudding cups, ice cream cups or Jell-O jigglers. Let your child help decide. Please avoid cakes and cupcakes because they are very messy.

The Celebration of Life is a very special occasion to honor your child’s life. You are welcome to join the celebration by reading your child’s story. If you aren’t able to attend, the teacher will read it. In either case, thank you for your help in making your child’s celebration a meaningful and memorable event.

Other Celebrations

Celebrations are emphasized by all classes during the course of the year, however, each class may add its own special touch on each celebration. Some of the annual traditions we celebrate will include:

- Cultural festivals: culminating our on-going international studies unit, give the children a chance to pull together everything they have learned.
- Thanksgiving: A time for reflection, giving thanks, and community service. Classes will prepare a Thanksgiving luncheon to enjoy with one another.
- Christmas: The story of this holiday is retold, with the focus on the birth of Jesus Christ.
- President’s Day: We celebrate a bit of American history through the lives of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.
- Grandparents’ Day: A traditional family event that occurs in Spring. Grandparents and special friends are invited to share a morning with students in the classroom.
- Passover and Easter: The stories of these two holidays are retold, with the focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- Earth Day: Celebrating the coming of Spring and the importance of stewardship for the Earth. Students become involved in meaningful environmental studies and projects.
- Commencement: Abner celebrates the graduation of each class with a beautiful end-of-year commencement ceremony.

Absence due to illness

Whenever your child is ill and won't be coming to school, please call the office between 8:30 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. to let us know that he/she will be absent so we know how to plan for lunch and other activities. Students with infectious diseases, such as chicken pox, and strep throat, must stay out of school until the contagious stage has passed. For the sake of other children's health, it is vital that you let the office know your child's doctor's diagnosis as soon as possible.

In the case of a common cold, the student should remain at home as long as fever is present, or if there is a sore throat, eye infection, or severe nasal excretions. Students with symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, or undiagnosed skin rash should remain at home as well. The student will be sent home if any of these symptoms appear while he or she is at school.

Illness detected at school:

If your child ever falls ill, or seems to be fairly sick, we will contact you to arrange for him/her to be picked up. We understand how difficult it can be for working parents to break free during the day, yet all of our children get ill from time to time, so please make arrangements with a friend or relative in advance.

Remember: Because colds, flu, and other childhood illnesses spread from child to child with alarming speed, please do not send your child to school if he/she has a fever, nausea, or any other symptoms of illness. This practice will make it better for all families by reducing the amount of sick time for the children.

Emergency Care

Most of our faculty and staff are trained in first aid and certified in CPR and can handle most scrapes and bruises. In the event of any medical situation that requires immediate medical attention, we will want your child to see a doctor. Please remember to keep your emergency and contact information form up-to-date in the office. We must be able to reach you at any time during the school day. If your child needs immediate medical attention, and you cannot be reached, your enrollment agreement authorizes us to seek medical care in your name. Please be sure to keep your emergency information form up-to-date.

Medication

Except under extraordinary situations, we prefer not to administer medication at school. Please do not send in any medication with your child, including aspirin or other over-the-counter drugs.

When it is necessary that medication be administered during school hours, a representative of the school will give it to your child in accordance with the following procedures:

- Any medication brought to school must be left with the staff.
- Our staff members are prohibited from providing or administering any medication, including aspirin, to any student except as authorized by you as parent or guardian and the child's physician, in accordance with the following procedures:

1. Prescription Medications:

- a. All medications sent from home must be accompanied by the "Authorization to Administer Medication" or a "Physician's Statement" to administer the medication at school. Any medication sent without the appropriate completed authorization form will not be administered and will be sent home.
- b. If a medication is to be administered on an on-going basis, the Authorization to Administer Medication should indicate the duration of treatment.
- c. In cases involving long-term medication for chronic conditions, a new authorization form must be filed with the school each year in August. Any medication changes during the school year must be accompanied by a new medication form.
- d. We can only administer oral medications.
- e. The original bottle containing the medication must be clearly labeled with the student's name, medication contained, and the time(s) and amount(s) of dosage. This policy applies to prescription and over-the-counter medications. A new authorization form must be completed for each episode of illness and each new medication. When having the prescription filled, you may request two bottles. If the medication is liquid, please do not dilute it with water.
- f. As parent (guardian), you are responsible for administering the first day's dosage of any new medication at home.
- g. As parent (guardian), you are responsible for notifying the school in person or by telephone on the first morning a new medication is being brought in with the completed authorization form or physician's statement.
- h. Whenever possible, medication schedules should be arranged to cause minimal interruption in the student's school day.
- i. A copy of the form authorizing us to dispense medication may be obtained from the school.

2. Over-the-Counter Medication:

Absolutely no medications, including aspirin, Tylenol, cough remedies, or other over-the-counter medications will be given or allowed to be taken at school unless authorization is submitted in accordance with the above policy.

Volunteering The Gift of Time and Talent

Parents play a crucial role in the Abner community. Abner encourages families to participate in the broader life of the school through social and educational activities. One of the most valuable contributions that families make to Abner is the gift of their time and expertise. Teachers will have opportunities for parents to get involved.

Here are a few ways in which you can help out at Abner:

- Volunteer to be a part of the PTO
 - Help the teachers organize field trips or special lessons
 - Help organize special events
 - Share your talents and special interests, such as a musical instrument that you play, a second language that you speak, a craft that you enjoy, or a field that you've studied
- Abner depends on our combined talents.

Class and Community Meetings

One evening of each semester during the school year, Abner's parents, teachers, administrators, and other interested families are invited to meet together for class and community meetings. This tradition offers us the opportunity to explore issues of common interest in an open community forum. Parents and teachers who participate tend to gain a much deeper understanding of the school's mission, strengths, and the issues that challenge it. Many of us treasure the opportunity to have a direct voice in the life of the school. Class meetings are normally held in either the classroom or the gym, typically starting at 6:30 p.m. Prior notification of these meetings will be given. Discussions will vary from focus on the classroom to what is new in Montessori. At times, we will have speakers come and share their knowledge with us. All sorts of questions arise and are discussed.

Communication between home and school

During the school year Abner Montessori school will send parents emails, letters, notes, newsletters, announcements, and children's work. These items will be placed in the child's box. Parents are asked to check this box every few days. We will also be using our website to keep parents up-to-date. For upcoming events we now have a calendar page.

Communication with second families

Whenever parents are separated, divorced, or for some other reason not living at the same address, we want to keep both parents informed of their child's progress and school matters. An exception may be requested by a court order prior to the child's entering school by either one 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.

- Copies of progress reports and announcements mailed out or sent home with students will be received by both parents at their respective addresses.
- Invitations to school functions will be sent to both parents.
- When parent-teacher conferences are scheduled, the teachers should not be asked to conduct separate conferences for each parent. We need to communicate the same thing to both parents at the same time, as this experience can never be exactly duplicated. 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.

Observing the Classes at Work

Parents are invited and even urged to observe the children at work. Contact your child's teachers to arrange a visit. 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 or in the observation room. A great deal can be learned by patient and quiet observation of your child and his or her classmates at work.

During the first three 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 and get a visitor's badge from the school office upon their arrival.

Evaluation of Student Progress

The Montessori curriculum is carefully structured and sequenced and the teachers maintain careful tracking sheets of each student's academic progress.

Montessori Schools do not compare students against an arbitrary standard or the performance of their classmates, we do not use familiar letter grades. We will have a scheduled parent/teacher conference around the middle of the school year to review the children's development and discuss your child's growth. As parents, you are welcomed to schedule a conference with your child's teacher anytime throughout the year.

Abner's Fundamental Ground Rules

As a school founded on the Montessori ideals, we assume that every person deserves respect. Abner expects students to demonstrate kindness, courtesy, and respect toward the school, its environment, fellow students, parents, teachers, visitors, 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, rather than to assume that misbehavior and punishment are inevitable; to develop a strong sense of self-discipline, responsibility and courtesy; to develop an atmosphere conducive to peaceful studies. When anyone at Abner 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. Neither corporal punishment, nor physical or emotional intimidation, is allowed at Abner. 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 asked to leave the school by the Executive Director.

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.

These are Abner's Ground Rules: 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 their work.
- Everyone has a right to their 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 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 has the right to be physically safe. Please don't do anything that might hurt or endanger anyone.
- At Abner, no one is allowed to fight, push, trip, or use any other aggressive behavior.
- Use the playground and other equipment as intended.
- Stop chasing or playing scary games when asked.
- Please don't tackle or trip one another in any games.
- Keep play and work equipment in the designated areas.
- Do not throw sand, rocks, sticks, toys or other objects not designed to be thrown.
- Do not leave your teacher's supervision without permission.
- 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.

Rules for Safety on the School Bus

Please be sure that you understand and can support the following basic safety rules while riding on the bus. Safety is our prime concern, and we must insist that every student follow certain rules of safe and courteous conduct while riding our school bus.

- Stay in your seat at all times while the bus is moving.
- 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 bus window.
- Never throw anything out of the bus.
- Do not play with sharp objects, such as pens or pencils, on the bus.
- Do not eat or drink on the bus.

Remember that all of the normal school rules apply on the bus as well.

Fire Drills

Random fire drills will be conducted by the office.

- The alarm will be a special bell, which will ring continuously in the event of a fire or drill.
- When 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.

Bringing a Guest to School

Students are welcome to bring a friend to school for a visit, although, certain arrangements must be made at least one day in advance with the teachers and office. There may be reasons why we may not be able to have a guest on a given day, such as a field trip.

Before the visiting day, the visiting student's parents will need to complete an emergency information form and submit to the office a note giving their permission for their child to visit Abner.

Tuition Policies

Abner is a private school 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 any and all services to students whose accounts have fallen behind unless written arrangements have been made for deferred payment. Abner reserves the right to charge any late fees or returned check fees. Your cooperation is essential and very much appreciated.

Re-Enrollment

Invitations to continue at Abner are normally automatic, but are not guaranteed. Decisions are made by the administration and faculty, based on an annual review of each student's academic progress, social and emotional development, 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 mailed home in early March and is due back at the school by April 15th along with the registration deposit. If the school has not received a student's re-enrollment materials by April 15th, his/her 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 his/her account.

Typical Class Size

A typical Montessori class is made up of twenty-five to thirty children, representing a three-year age span, taught by a certified Montessori teacher and 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 fuels 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 of twenty-five to thirty 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 or 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 essentially a 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?

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. His/her role centers around 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:

- 1). To awaken our children’s spirit and imagination.
- 2). To encourage their normal desire for independence and high sense of self-esteem.
- 3). To help them develop the kindness and self-discipline that will allow them to become full members of society.
- 4). To help them learn how to observe, question, and explore ideas independently.

The sum of all four will help your child maximize their potential.

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 to 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 around 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.

The Building Blocks of Learning: Our Fundamental Beliefs as a School

The Montessori approach to learning is the educational building block of Abner School. 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.

The information below 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 people.

Our goals for students are for them to be open-minded and compassionate, to gain a sense of empowerment, and to understand and appreciate the diversity of the human spirit. Abner 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, spiritual, 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 humanistic 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.

- I. We believe that every member of our community has a fundamental right to be treated with respect, regardless of age.
 - A. We respect the fundamental human needs, rights, and dignity of each person, no matter how young, as a full and independent person who is engaged in the ongoing process of development. During this process, while honoring the right to self-determination, we model and encourage certain values: kindness, honesty, warmth and openness, respect for each person’s uniqueness, tolerance, cooperation, good sportsmanship, and nonviolence.
 - B. In keeping with the true meaning of the word discipline, which is to teach, we prefer to model and encourage appropriate, kind, and considerate ways to behave in various situations.
 1. We use positive reinforcement whenever possible to encourage progress and acknowledge contributions, rather than focusing on the rules and the consequences for breaking them.

2. We encourage and model ways to negotiate in conflict situations so that whenever possible everyone can win and at the very least everyone feels heard and that her feelings and needs are respected.
 3. As necessary we cue and remind people of appropriate behavior before they forget.
 4. When behavior is inappropriate and a gentle reminder isn't enough, we intervene and respectfully but firmly stop the behavior.
 5. Our ultimate goal is to encourage self-discipline and self-motivation as the reasons for behavior rather than fear or motivation from without.
- C. We recognize that misbehavior comes from discouragement. We therefore do not label a child as "bad," but instead try to recognize the mistaken goals of the misbehavior that usually involve an attempt at searching for a place in the family or community, even if it is an undesirable place. We then look to find appropriate ways to encourage the individual.

II. Intelligence is not rare.

- A. We approach learning seeking to understand each person's uniqueness and guide her individually and at her own pace, through the range of learning skills so she fully realizes her potential. We do not subscribe to the "Bell Curve" theory for measuring performance, and respectfully submit that the vast majority of people have the intelligence and natural ability required to learn everything they need to lead full, happy, and productive lives.
- B. We celebrate the natural diversity of human beings, be it in learning style, interests, or definition of what makes a happy and successful life.

III. Wisdom can be cultivated.

- A. We believe that true wisdom is the ability to listen to your heart and know how best to put your intelligence to work for you and others. In order to achieve this goal, self-esteem, human dignity, and emotional well being, as well as the ability to communicate and cooperate effectively with others, must be valued at least as highly as academic and material success.
- B. We affirm the ideal of the renaissance person. Our ultimate goal is to help cultivate men and women who have not only learned how to learn, but also have an innate love of learning, a wide range of interests, and an openness to new ideas and possibilities.

IV. Self-esteem is the crucial ingredient for the full expression of a person's potential.

- A. Nurturing self-esteem: We strive to base interaction between community members, from how we discipline to respecting personal learning styles and stages of development, on this principle. This is the very fabric of our community and our educational methods.
- B. Learning from experience: We consciously encourage our students to not be afraid of taking risks, but rather to use the countless positive and negative experiences that everyone inevitably has in a lifetime as non-threatening feedback on their progress and personal growth.
- C. Abner's expectations: In all cases we set our expectations high, not asking individuals to do more than they are capable of, but consistently stressing at all grade levels the importance of careful work and pride in accomplishment. The reward is not in a quantity of work achieved but the satisfaction of work done well for its own sake. We carefully build a supportive environment for the unhurried mind to move steadily toward the pursuit of excellence.
- D. Competition: We encourage the development of respect for natural abilities. While we allow people to experience failure by separating the deed from the doer in all things, from earliest times we seek to minimize any negative effect on self-esteem that failure or lack of natural ability in an area might have. We do not believe that it is either necessary or appropriate to inspire unrestrained academic pressure and scholastic competition among students. We cultivate the ability to accept success with grace, and failure or loss with dignity, and resolve to build on the experience. We ensure the right to choose whether or not to participate in competitive activities, and we stress the principles of good sportsmanship.

V. The development of a whole, healthful being requires the nurturing of our many dimensions, including the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional.

- A. Spiritual: We feel that each person has a spirit within the physical body. We seek to develop a spiritual awareness in each person.
- B. Intellectual: The intellect is an important tool in the shaping of our world. Through the development of our thinking abilities we refine our emotional responses, we clarify our picture of the universe, and we develop the discipline to maintain vibrant health.
- C. Physical: Recognizing that the intellectual and emotional potential and capabilities of our brains are, like any other organ, dependent on a clean, healthful bloodstream, we acknowledge our place in the physical world and seek to discover, understand, and adopt the lifestyle habits most appropriate and beneficial for our bodies and minds. Among these are fresh air, pure water, exercise, sunlight, and proper diet.
- D. Emotional: Our emotions are complex and powerful and it is very important that we learn to feel them fully and without fear, identify them correctly (in ourselves and others), respect them, and accept them. It is equally important, however, that we learn to harness their power and not let them control our lives unchecked.

VI. Abner is centered around the stages of personal development.

- A. Developmental stages: Our faculty is actively involved in a continuous study of human development. This study includes keeping abreast of current theories on development, regular student observation, and a constant evaluation of the curriculum to ensure that it is appropriate for the developmental stages of our students.
- B. Active learning: We promote active rather than passive learning by:
 - 1. encouraging students to pursue studies in all areas of their spontaneous personal interests;
 - 2. using hands-on, “experiential” learning whenever possible rather than lecture and drill, whether through concrete manipulative learning materials, experimental discovery seminar discussions, independent library research, field investigation, or computer simulations; and
 - 3. bringing the student to a sense of closure and recognition of having reached a pre-established goal for learning.
- C. Passage to abstraction: To facilitate this process, we consistently work from a very concrete level of experience to the abstract. To aid students in learning, we begin by giving them the “big picture”, and work from this toward an increasing level of detail. This concept has created a spiraling curriculum in which skills and concepts are presented and reintroduced at increasing levels of complexity and abstraction over the years.
- D. External structure: As necessary we provide community members with sufficient external structure and support in a committed effort to ensure that their developmental needs are met. We do this in a manner that reflects our expectations and philosophy.

VII. Abner provides a broad preparation for life, balancing academic excellence with the development of personal and practical life skills.

- A. Success: We design our educational program to maximize each person’s academic and personal success. We strive to encourage people to build on their strengths and personal learning styles and learn from their mistakes.
 - 1. Academic success: We encourage skills that support independent and successful learning, critical thinking, cooperative projects, reflective reading, problem solving, library research, use of technology, and techniques for effective study.
 - 2. Personal success: We consider it equally important that our community members be successful human beings who can establish healthy relationships and achieve happiness in their personal lives. We teach our students to pay attention to and respect feelings, both their own and those of others. We help them to learn to solve conflicts effectively and fairly, and to express their feelings in a healthy manner. Group dynamics and communication skills are also stressed.

- B. Practical life:** To facilitate and encourage a sense of independence, we deliberately teach a wide range of practical life skills appropriate to each child's level of development. We regard this as a vital element affecting the design of our entire curriculum. These practical life skills include the following:
1. Eye-hand coordination and the use of simple tools.
 2. Grace and courtesy: appropriate ways to handle situations kindly.
 3. Practical economics: the value and use of money, including how to earn and manage spending money.
 4. Technology: the safe use of technology, such as more complex tools, telephones, computers, classroom audio-visual equipment, and household appliances.
 5. Transportation: As appropriate at each age level, the safe use of alternate means of transportation other than a parent's car, such as hiking and bicycling.
 6. Communication: the appropriate use of the technology of personal and mass communication.
 7. Household Engineering: how to clean and set tables, do dishes, cook, wash and fold laundry.
- C. Health and Safety:** the development of sound habits of safety, nutrition and hygiene, along with the acquisition of first-aid skills and as developmentally appropriate, CPR.
- D. Empowerment:** We make a concerted effort to empower people, helping them to learn how to make responsible choices for themselves, to recognize that they are assuming increasing control over their lives as they mature, and to discover how to make a difference in the world around them by positive efforts and contributions to others.

VIII. We recognize that the first nine years are critical to the development of one's life.

- A.** We place a primary emphasis on building relationships with families as early as possible in order to help parents recognize the uniqueness of their child. We also work together to enhance the parents' ability to parent.
- B.** We believe that the experiences a child has both at home and at school in the first nine years are the most important of her lifetime because here her self-concept and her concept of the world and her place in it are set in stone. What she will attempt and whether or not she will succeed at it are profoundly influenced by these beliefs about herself. Although we as Montessori parents, teachers and students are living proof that changes can happen after this critical period, the changes are accomplished with a chisel and hammer on stone rather than with gentle fingers on wet clay.

IX. Abner is designed for flexibility in its methodology and use of resources.

- A. Meeting Individual Needs:** We use the Montessori approach, along with additional approaches and materials from the larger non-Montessori educational community, to pro-

- vide opportunities for enrichment beyond the basic curriculum. We strive for individualized pacing and adaptation of the classroom program (when possible) to meet varied styles of learning.
- B. Curriculum Framework: In designing this individualized program we follow an established curricular framework that includes the school's expectations for basic academic achievement.
 - C. Diverse Learning Styles: We regard a mix of backgrounds and abilities as a positive and important element in our community. We understand that children take in information in many different ways. We seek to present information to meet the different ways children learn.
- X. We strive for a balance between freedom, order and responsibility.**
- A. We interpret the general principle of Montessori education, "follow the child" to refer to the importance of allowing people to pursue areas of spontaneous interest whenever possible. However if a child needs more direction at certain times or is not internally motivated in a given area, then we feel it is our responsibility to acknowledge the personal preference but to still require that the necessary work be completed.
 - B. To facilitate the development of independence and a sense of engagement with the community we strongly encourage participation in day-to-day classroom management, care of the environment and decision making. We seek to help each community member to see the value of commitment both to our community and to the community of humankind, and that the good of the individual and that of the community and each of its other members is much more interdependent than some recent cultural trends would have us believe.
 - C. We seek to show and teach our students that the freedom and education they receive here come with the responsibility to help others both in the community, and those less fortunate but no less deserving. To show them that the responsibility to change our world for the better lies with all of us, and that service needs to be an accepted part of everyone's life if we are to achieve this goal. Opportunities to perform community service in the community at large include, the adoption of needy families by the classes at holiday time, and sharing of clothes and toys with underprivileged children.
 - D. As educators, parents and citizens of the world with the mutual goal of world peace we consider it our responsibility to model and encourage tolerance both to our children and to each other. Tolerance of differences in ability, in color, in culture, in beliefs, in thought, in ways of doing things, in dress and in physical appearance. Tolerance of the particular process that each of us must go through on our particular path in life, balanced with the self-esteem and self-confidence not to be threatened by these differences.

XI. Strengthening our connection with nature and the environment is an integral part of Abner.

- A. We believe that being involved physically with nature and directly with the environment are basic to being a whole and healthy human being.
- B. We consciously work to foster in each person a strong sense of belonging to the web of life. We accomplish this goal through:
 - 1. Programs in outdoor education, and field biology at every age level in the school, using the natural setting of the campus and the wide variety of natural resources around us as a classroom out of doors.
 - 2. Programs in gardening and small animal care.
 - 3. Programs in field ecological studies in natural wilderness settings.
 - 4. We stress recycling and environmentally friendly packaging for lunches and all foods and products used in our community.

XII. Abner recognizes that contemporary society must embrace the diversity in mankind to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by an ever-growing world population that is integrating well beyond traditionally established cultural borders. We celebrate diversity in our community and acknowledge the unique contributions of all individuals, who enrich and inspire our personal growth.

- A. We seek to develop a global perspective through the study of other cultures, cultural geography, and international festivals.
- B. We develop a strong historical perspective through the study of prehistory and history, following an anthropological orientation into fundamental needs of humankind and the cultures, lifestyles and technology of the past. We cultivate an appreciation of family and community heritage. History sets the stage for integrated learning at every age level.
- C. We are committed to making this experience truly inclusive by pursuing funding sources and endowments to offer scholarships for families who are unable to fund their child's education themselves. We hope to provide an open environment to share our values in a truly diverse community. We endeavor to reach out and invite families that have commonly experienced exclusion from high quality education. We invite families to discover Abner and inform us of their individual needs. We sincerely explore the accommodation of children with special needs and welcome their participation when we believe that Abner can offer the best learning environment for them.
- D. Community is the invisible web that structures many of our beliefs. Culturally, historically and individually, our communities represent the best of our shared experiences.

XIII. All forms of human communication are explored.

- A. We recognize that we live in a time when the various languages of art, (visual, written, spoken and musical) particularly through mass media, have a profound impact on our lives. We develop in each person the ability to understand and filter this influence. We also believe that by developing our ability to use these languages we strengthen our self-esteem and enhance our ability to express more effectively our thoughts and feelings.
- B. As educators we consciously work to encourage people to think creatively in their problem solving and research.
- C. As is appropriate for each age group, we encourage students to become aware of the major social, political, economic, environmental and ethical issues of our day.
- D. We are constantly modeling and encouraging communication between all members of our community. We would like all community members to be versed in skills of active listening, negotiation, empathy for another person's position, and the ability to stand up for oneself and say no without guilt if someone is encroaching on their rights.

Shining Light on Life Building Experiences

In a world of rapid change and new discoveries, we can only guess at the skills our students 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.

Abner offers our children a world-class education with a humanistic approach that nurtures their self-confidence, personal creativity, and independence. It offers them the most challenging academic program that they can handle in a course of study that includes unified mathematics, geometry, history, geography, economics, ethics, botany and zoology, ecology, art, and physical education.

We can see our students come to love learning and begin to discover their true potential. Abner's goal is to nurture their intelligence and creativity, helping our students reach their potential in the intellectual tradition of Maria Montessori.