
Learning from Home Handbook

Highland Community School

March 14, 2020



The creation of this guide would not have been possible without the work of the staff of The Montessori School of Tokyo and many other educators from around the world. Individuals have worked diligently to create the best possible alternatives for their community in this difficult time and were generous enough to share their resources. We owe them our gratitude and thanks!



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A Vision of Learning from a Montessori Perspective

"Our aim is not merely to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so to touch his imagination as to enthuse him to his innermost core."

Dr Maria Montessori

As we embark on a time of 'Learning from Home,' our aim is to create a Montessori-based framework that serves our students while supporting parents as we all adapt to a different daily routine. It is important to us that the children's activity during this time be enjoyable, thoughtful, challenging and rewarding.

Replicating what happens in our classrooms is not something we can achieve during this period. Our goal is to work in collaboration with families to keep alive the culture of learning that is unique to Montessori and provide families with support and activities that match the developmental needs and characteristics of the child.

How do we establish this at home?

The Montessori method is all about the process. While completion of work is important, it is our approach that makes all the difference. Learning is most effective when it is within a greater context. When we connect subjects and concepts, we establish meaning which fuels motivation in students. Above all, we want children to feel connected to their learning, not simply "complete assignments" while at home.

Learning together with a sense of **exploration, curiosity and discovery** results in deeper and more meaningful experiences for children. This instills a great sense of ownership and responsibility for the child.

It is important to us that we maintain a feeling of connectedness throughout this process. We will be in regular contact in a variety of ways and continued communication between teachers and families throughout the period of closure is assured.

The guidelines throughout this Handbook will outline how HCS's teachers and administration will support all of our HCS families throughout this period of 'Learning from Home.'



Feeling of Responsibility and Contribution to the Community and Family

Being in a Montessori school is often described by students as being part of a big family. All of the aspects detailed above result in a feeling of belonging to a community and with that, we learn that there is a responsibility to ourselves, others and the environment.

It is our commitment to each child at HCS that they reach their fullest potential and feel that they are a valued part of our community. We aim to continue in this aim even when we are physically apart.

The Prepared Environment

For our younger students, the learning environment is your home and surroundings. This means finding ways to support independence, engage in meaningful tasks and supplement learning through various activities suggested by teachers.

For our older Elementary to Adolescent students, this will mean all of the above, plus establishing a quiet space, expectations and routines for any specific assignments shared by teachers.

Where age-appropriate, you might like to discuss 'Learning from Home' with your child and include them in some decision-making processes:

- Ask them where to set up their space (if applicable)
- Make a schedule together that works for your family (when to take breaks, have time outdoors, etc.)
- Gather ideas for activities and projects
- Organize materials
- For our older students, it will be important for them to maintain their routine of handing in work and receiving feedback from their teachers.

Overall, we can approach this as an opportunity to be creative and collaborative - we are here to support you through this process.



Practical Life

Practical life is an important part of experiential learning. It is part of every Montessori classroom and can be mirrored at home. These activities assist students in developing purposeful life skills for their continued growth and development. This includes refining fine motor and movement skills and practicing coordination, planning and problem- solving. Practical life activities:

- foster order and sequence
- develop concentration
- foster physical independence
- foster the development of fine motor control
- provide opportunities for planning and carrying out tasks

The Practical Life area also provides children with opportunities to contribute to family life. Inherent in these activities is the development of key executive functions: decision making, organization, problem-solving, impulse control, collaboration and communication. These skills form the foundation of a child’s academic learning. For example, sequencing a task is a pre-reading skill.

Examples of practical life might include:

- setting the table
- watering plants
- tidying and organizing rooms
- planning an outing
- taking care of pets
- preparing a snack/meal
- helping with shopping lists/budgeting
- repairing a bicycle
- planting a small urban garden

Practical life is engaging for children at all stages of development and tasks are designed according to their level of coordination and independence. You can organize a “job chart” or list of family projects as a way to help guide your child’s interests. Planning and gathering resources to complete the tasks is purposeful work.

These ideas foster a sense of contribution, responsibility, shared experiences and satisfaction.

As our children get older, these activities lead naturally to volunteer experiences and beginnings of community work. For our oldest adolescents, many of these practical life experiences are the foundation of their sense of belonging and personal vision.



The Uninterrupted Work Cycle

Establishing a routine that works for your family is an essential first step to creating a successful learning environment at home. Children are very familiar with this framework from school. In a Montessori classroom, children are given large blocks of time in order to explore their work deeply. This contributes directly to the development of concentration and provides opportunities to collaborate and problem-solve. It is the framework that fosters child-centered as opposed to teacher-directed learning.

Ownership of Tasks and Sharing of Learning

Montessori learning environments are often referred to as “optimal learning environments” because of the inherent skills and outcomes that result from being in a rich and interesting classroom, coupled with the dynamic of interactions amongst peers and teachers.

In order to foster a deep sense of ownership in their learning, we focus on two things: the developmental needs and characteristics of the child and their interests. Here are a few key points that aid in cultivating a child’s self-direction and attention to their work:

- Choice
- Participation in planning and organizing tasks
- Conversation
- Finding good resources
- Sharing of knowledge

You will be receiving regular communications from your child’s classroom teachers in the coming weeks. We encourage parents to follow the teachers’ suggestions and guidance when completing work at home. The more children are involved in developing and detailing their activities, the more they can achieve.

One Note Regarding Sharing or Presenting Work

It is a regular occurrence in an Elementary (or older) Montessori classroom for children to present their work or projects to one another. This is something you can replicate at home. Planning a presentation or sharing time at the end of a project is very exciting for young children and gives our older students an opportunity to use their voice. It is an essential part of the learning process as it requires synthesis of learning to describe, explain and express yourself clearly. It feels celebratory as well!



Toddlers (2 - 3 years)

Students may be expected to:

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions

Parents are invited to:

- Remain mindful and respectful about the growing self-esteem and sense of independence that your child is developing
- Help your child with the hardest part of a task (not the whole task)
- Initiate verbal communication frequently, ask question, share concerns and observations
- Be consistent; follow routines and clear sequences for each activity
- Limit screen time
- Include your child in household chores
- Provide opportunities for outdoor activities (gross motor skill development)
- Let go of perfection. What you are experiencing now is not the final goal. It is foundational
- Enjoy and appreciate time with your child

Toddler Teachers will:

- Initiate individual support and communications based on each child's needs
- Provide detailed updates and consultation (as required) regarding toilet learning/ sleeping habits/activities (fine/gross motor)
- Share the current class routine/schedule and then suggest guidance in setting up a daily routine at home
- Share guidelines and suggestions for screen time
- Share general/ individual suggestions for activities for fine/gross motor skills, providing pictures/videos/materials for parent viewing
- Provide suggestions for books and songs to support language acquisition
- Provide videos of teachers singing and performing hand actions to well-loved class songs
- Share suggestions for practical life activities at home e.g. recipes, food prep, house chores, clothing tips, etc.
- Be responsive to parent questions and available to offer guidance and tips for activities or any other element of support for your child's development

A few examples to get you started:

Area of Development Activities	
Gross Motor Skills	Going for a walk (taking time, walking slowly), jumping, climbing stairs
Fine Motor Skills	Cutting, gluing, coloring, stringing large beads
Food Prep	Spreading butter, slicing fruits, pouring milk, making pizza
Literacy	Reading to your child, listening and talking with your child



Children's House (3 - 6 years)

Students may be expected to:

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions

Families are invited to:

- Remain mindful about your child's stress or worries during this time of change
- Monitor communication about your child from your teachers
- Initiate communication with teachers about questions, ideas, concerns, feedback
- Support your child's independence in daily life activities
- Be mindful of and allow children to continue periods of concentration
- Establish daily routines and expectations
- **Limit screen time**
- Provide opportunities for daily physical activity

Children's House Teachers will:

- Initiate individual communications based on student needs
- Give guidance in setting up a daily routine
- Make suggestions for appropriate house chores
- Offer guidelines and suggestions for screen time
- Provide both general and individualized suggestions for activities developing fine motor skills/ gross motor skills / language / numeracy
- Be prompt in replying to your emails if you need additional guidance and support

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Children aged 3 - 6 thrive in environments that promote repetition, routine and the mastery of purposeful movement
- Allow your child to choose activities and give the opportunity for periods of time without distractions
- The key to a successful learning environment is order, access to tactile resources, space to explore and meaningful activity. For the Children's House child, 'work' and 'play' should be interchangeable - a natural, fun and exciting part of life.



Lower Elementary (6 - 9 years)

Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work with guidance from parents
- Follow teachers' guidelines and academic expectations
- Work with integrity on assigned tasks - do your best!

Families are invited to:

- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home
- Establish a consistent routine and work schedule together
- Follow along with the teachers' suggested activities to maintain skills and concepts
- Provide opportunities for your child to share/present work to you

Lower Elementary Teachers will:

- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward
- Communicate in a consistent fashion with parents, replying to emails promptly
- Offer Parent Education resources
- Share a daily "Morning Greeting" via email
- Offer feedback to students
- Collaborate with Enrichment staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music and PE

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Respect the stage of development - many Lower Elementary students are at a "concrete level" and require the Montessori materials to complete certain task. Teachers will guide you regarding what works makes sense for your child
- Develop ideas that allow the opportunity for Lower Elementary students to build from their interests. Examples may include projects, journals, creative writing, geometry constructions, Practical Life at home
- Encourage socialization (electronically/not in-person). Lower Elementary students are extremely social; they will need to feel connected to their friends. Letter writing via email may be a great way to stay in touch and practice writing skills



Upper Elementary (9 - 12 years)

Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work as independently as possible
- Follow teachers' guidelines and expectations
- Be own advocate when assistance or further clarification is required
- Communicate directly with teachers
- Compose and maintain a portfolio of work to bring to school when classes resume.

Families are invited to:

- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home
- Establish a routine and work schedule
- Follow along with the teachers' suggested activities to maintain skills and concepts
- Meet and review your child's assignments; provide opportunities at home for work presentations

Upper Elementary Teachers will:

- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward
- Communicate in a consistent fashion with parents, replying to emails promptly
- Offer Parent Education resources
- Write a letter to the class detailing expectation during the 'Learning from Home' period
- Share a daily "Morning Greeting" via email
- Offer feedback to students
- Collaborate with Enrichment staff to provide activities and suggestions for Art, Music and PE

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- Respect the stage of development - some students may still be at a "concrete level" and require the Montessori materials to complete certain tasks. Avoid "teaching" shortcuts for subjects such as Mathematics. Common items like dried beans can be used for many math concepts.
- Develop ideas that allow the opportunity for Upper Elementary students to build from their interests. Examples may include projects, journals, creative writing, geometry constructions, and practical life (sewing, organizing, cooking, etc.)
- Support the need for Upper Elementary students' group work - working with a friend via Facetime or phone (if possible) may be very well received.
- Encourage socialization (electronically/not in-person). Upper Elementary students are extremely social; they will need to feel connected to their friends.
- While we don't expect parents to review assignments, please do support work completion.



Adolescent Program (12 - 15 years)

Students are expected to:

- Schedule their own time
- Review both individual and group lesson expectations
- Work solidly for roughly 4 hours a day
- Submit or review assigned work according to guidelines
- Compose and maintain a portfolio of work to bring to school when classes resume (if not completing work digitally)

Families are invited to:

- Check in with your child each morning to plan schoolwork time and workspace
- Maintain daily conversations about work progress
- Invite your child to prepare a meal for the family once per week
- Invite your child to contribute more than usual to household chores
- View and discuss suggested movies/web inquiries with your child when possible
- Share news items especially related to coronavirus

AP Teachers will:

- Provide academic guidelines both digitally and paper copy for duration of the school closure
- Daily posts will be made via email, Basecamp, & Facebook
- Answer student or parent emails within 24 hours
- Reach out to students individually each week to check in with progress by advisor

Program-Specific Needs and Characteristics

- In general, we expect AP students to take responsibility for completing their work within the timelines provided
- There is an opportunity for parents and students to discuss topics of inquiry from their studies. Watching or reading the news together, and otherwise having adult-style conversations is very important.
- While we don't expect parents to review assignments, please do support work completion.
- Adolescents crave and require social interaction. Please facilitate ways your child can interact with each other (electronically/not in-person) in a supervised manner.



Special Education and Intervention Supports

Children House Students are expected to:

- Enjoy family life with developmentally appropriate contributions

Lower Elementary Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work with guidance from parents
- Follow teachers' guidelines and academic expectations
- Work with integrity on assigned tasks - do your best!

Upper Elementary and Adolescent Students are expected to:

- Plan and organize work as independently as possible
- Follow teachers' guidelines and expectations
- Be own advocate when assistance or further clarification is required
- Communicate directly with teachers
- Compose and maintain a portfolio of work to bring to school when classes resume.

Families are invited to:

- Guide your child to set up a prepared environment at home
- Establish a consistent routine and work schedule together
- Follow along with the teachers' suggested activities to maintain skills and concepts
- Provide opportunities for your child to share/present work to you

Special Education Teachers, Speech Therapists, and Support Teachers will:

- Prepare a variety of appropriate tasks and activities for children to complete at home in order to maintain and move their learning forward
- Communicate in a consistent fashion with parents, replying to emails promptly, and Special Education Teachers, Speech Therapists, and Support Teachers will inform you of their phone office hours to answer any questions that may come up.
- Offer Parent Education resources
- Share a daily "Morning Greeting" via email
- Offer feedback to students



FAQs

When and how can I reach my child's teacher?

Email remains the best way to contact a teacher. If you wish to speak to a teacher, please use email to set up a time for a phone call.

When can I expect a response?

In most cases, you can expect a response to emails within 24 hours.

How much communication can I expect from the school?

The administration office will communicate with you directly should there be any updates on the Covid-19 situation that might have a direct impact on school operations. The frequency of communication from your child's teacher will vary depending on each program.

Can teachers tutor students individually online?

In most cases, no. Teachers will be connecting with families on a 'class level', and also sharing suggestions, feedback, and expectations on an individualized or small group level where necessary.

How much technology will be used?

This will vary greatly depending on the age of the students. Teachers will share information with families via email regarding assignment submission. We may utilize online video conferencing in certain circumstances. Your classroom teachers will share more information with you as soon as possible.

I don't have access to a printer. What should I do?

HCS will print work packets and let families know via email when and where they can be picked up.

What is the procedure for students and parents visiting on site?

If you are asked to come to HCS, we will share specific details about where to enter, where to wait and what hygiene procedures to follow.

How will the school keep me informed on the closure?

We currently expect to re-open on April 14th (immediately following our scheduled Spring Break). Any changes to this plan will be communicated via our school website and email.



Resources for Families

Podcasts for Children

The Big Life Kids
Wow in the World
Imagine This
Forever Ago
But Why: A Podcast for
Curious Kids
Pants on Fire
Tumble
Circle Round
Reading Bug Adventures

Good Night Stories for Rebel
Girls
The Purple Rocket
Fierce Girls
The Past and the Curious
Sparkle Stories
Earth Rangers
Myths and Legends
Peace Out
Story Time

What If World
Brains On!
Short and Curly
Classic Kids
The Alien Adventures of Finn
Caspian
The Unexplainable
Disappearance of Mars Patel
News Time

Math

Khan Academy Kids
<https://learn.khanacademy.org/khan-academy-kids/>

Aleks
<https://www.aleks.com>

Literacy

ABCmouse, Early Learning Academy (For
Children in Preschool-2nd Grade) access code:
SCHOOL8433
www.ABCmouse.com/redeem

ReadingIQ (For Children in Preschool-6th Grade)
access code: SCHOOL8433
www.ReadingIQ.com/redeem

Adventure Academy (For Children in 3rd-8th
Grade) access code: SCHOOL8433
www.AdventureAcademy.com/redeem

Steps to literacy
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2A41E71D4D894A7D>

Physical Fitness

GoNoodle
<https://www.gonoodle.com>

Art and Craft Activities

Easy Peasy and Fun
<https://www.easypeasyandfun.com/how-to-draw/>

Left Brain Craft Brain
<https://leftbraincraftbrain.com>

Science/Geography

DOGO News for Kids
<https://www.dogonews.com>

Virtual Museum Tours
<https://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours>

Mystery Science
<https://mysteryscience.com/school-closure-planning>



Prevention Measures from the CDC Website

- Clean your hands often
 - Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for [people who are at higher risk of getting very sick](#).
- Stay home if you are sick, except to get medical care. Learn [what to do if you are sick](#).
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze or use the inside of your elbow.
 - Throw used tissues in the trash.
 - Immediately wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, clean your hands with a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.



The graphic features a teal background with a white hand being washed under a faucet. The text is arranged in a structured layout with white and yellow boxes. The top left has the 'COVID 19' logo, and the top right has the title 'CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)'. A central yellow box contains the main message, and a dark teal box below it lists three key actions. The bottom right includes the CDC website URL and a date stamp.

COVID 19
CORONAVIRUS DISEASE

CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19)

You can help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses with these actions:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose & mouth.
- Wash hands often with soap & water for at least 20 seconds.

www.cdc.gov/COVID19

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