



# Elementary Parent Guide

Understanding your elementary child and school

Parents of children in the Montessori Elementary Program usually have a set of concerns that are quite different from the questions that parents have about their preschool age children. Questions turn from ones about a child protesting that he doesn't like school or refusing to finish all his lunch to ones involving academics and socialization.

We want you to understand as much as possible about the nature of your elementary age child and his experience at school. The topics discussed inside are important to our elementary children and their parents.

## Homework

**There are few subjects that are as important (as well as confusing) to parents as homework. What is its purpose? How much is enough ?**

The School accepts homework as a necessary part of a child's school education. There are a number of benefits that it can have if it is done correctly and with the right spirit.

One thing homework does is strengthen and broaden understanding of classroom lessons. Therefore, homework exercises that a child takes home may be repeated from time to time. Repetition is something that is valued in the Montessori classroom both as a reinforcement of material already learned and as an opportunity for the child to relax with something familiar and easy. Through repetition the child gains deeper and more definite knowledge of the subject matter.

Another benefit of homework is as a supplement and enrichment to the work done during the day. This covers a number of needed areas. One is a general enrichment that includes skills needed in public schools. Also included is work that extends either beyond public school or may not be covered well there. Such things include dictionary skills, sentence structure and composition, math word problems, and learning to put answers in a form that allows them to be checked more easily.

Of course, homework exercises that are new challenges are also beneficial. It allows the child to apply his or her skills in new areas or with harder problems. Teachers differ in how much they check homework for correctness. Some use it as a diagnostic tool to see which children need help in a given area, others use it more for practice and use other tools for diagnostics.

Also, some homework is a natural extension of what goes on in the classroom - it carries over to the home based on interest generated at school. For instance, a child excited about music in the classroom may want music lessons or an instrument to play at home. They may want pets as extensions of the interest they have acquired in the classroom about animals or they may want to go to the library to get more books on some interesting historical period they have been studying. In this way, the home can become an extension of the excitement generated in school.

In addition, homework can be individually tailored so that if a child has many outside activities and little time for homework, less can be given. Or, if the child has few outside activities and not enough structured time even with homework given, outside activities can be suggested as a supplement.

To sum up, homework has a number of possible benefits for children. If used well, it can help children deepen their understanding, supplement and enrich their knowledge, and stimulate exploration into new areas.

## Social Life

**In our small school, how can we offer the broad social atmosphere of a large public school? Won't children have fewer friends?**

The truth is that your child's social skills and peer interactions are much less a factor of the quantity of children in a school, but more of the quality of the atmosphere of the school in general and of the child's classroom in particular.

Ours is a small school, which lends to much individual attention. Our teachers get to know the children very well and are often better aware of the child's emotional needs and know the family better than in a large institution.

Parents who are working and cannot pick up their children until the late afternoon have expressed appreciation for the family atmosphere that our school provides. Each child is an important member in the school family. This enhances the children's feelings of community, comfort and security.

But what about peer group size? In a public school, even in a classroom of 35 children, one child will normally not be pals with a group of more than 3-5 peers. This is also the number of age-group peers the children have at Meher

Montessori School.

Many of the children have very close friends they have made at school. These friendships can be further cultivated outside school with your help. Encourage your child to get together with his/her school friends on weekends and during vacations. Many of the children already have exchanged telephone numbers. They will need your help in making arrangements to get together.

And, if you want to enlarge your child's peer activities outside school and home there are many possibilities. Among the best are:

- Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts/Campfire Girls/Indian Guides/
- Cub Scouts/Brownies/Blue Birds, etc.
- YMCA activities
- Little League/AYSO Soccer/other organized Sports
- Boys Clubs/Girls Clubs
- Dept. of Parks and Recreation activities

## Physical Education / Athletics

**Elementary age children need more vigorous physical activity than their primary age counterparts. What can we do to provide this for them?**

All our children participate in a physical education program taught by our physical education teacher. This is in addition to whatever games and other activities they have on the playground during recess.

In addition, for the upper elementary children, we currently have a jogging program in the park twice a week. Because we don't have a large playing field we recommend that if you want your child to participate in group team sports that you sign him up for AYSO soccer, Little League, etc. Team sports programs outside an elementary school are most always better organized and coached than in-school programs.

## Testing

**Does the classroom teacher test the children? Do you give Achievement Tests**

Testing is one area in which a traditional Montessori School differs somewhat from public school and most private schools. Testing is good or bad depending on how it is used, and though it is clear that the motivation for testing is good (to ascertain the student's progress), there can be bad emotional consequences that accompany the testing process. Children may develop a significant portion of their self-esteem based upon how well they do on tests. This can lead to

accompanying anxiety and nervousness. This is in contrast to the natural and relaxed manner in which people learn best.

We agree that the teacher needs to know how the child is doing in all areas of the classroom. If the teacher is ignorant of the child's progress he is unable to give appropriate help. Therefore, each teacher has various diagnostic tools at his disposal that can give him the information necessary. Yes, the teachers may occasionally give the children a test of some sort, but they try to minimize any emotional effect and use the test as only one of many diagnostic tools for measuring the child's progress.

But what about Achievement Tests ? We do give achievement tests twice during the school year. We currently use the Stanford Achievement Test. It is highly respected nationwide. It is considered to be a very thorough standardized achievement test not only by our school but by public school educators, administrators, and experts in the field of testing.

We closely monitor the results of the tests. Although these tests have certain limitations, they do provide us with a somewhat objective measure of the children's achievement level in a manner understood by a wide range of people.

How do our children test? The test results indicate that in general the children test well above the national average for their age.

So, the teacher will occasionally use regular testing in the classroom both to prepare the child for his or her eventual transfer to another school and to see how well he is doing in a particular academic area. In addition we give standardized achievement tests to track our children's progress and to compare them to the national average.

## **The Inevitable Transfer**

**How do Montessori children adjust to a traditional school environment when they leave your school ? How are they prepared academically and socially?**

In general our children are well prepared academically and are usually substantially above the national average. Teachers like to get bright children who have a positive attitude toward learning. Children who are aggressive learners, who have a love of exploration are happy additions to any class.

The children who have been with us for a few years have come to accept freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of association as a normal part of their school life. Unfortunately, when they transfer to another school, whether it be public, private or parochial, they are likely to find that all of these "essential freedoms" are curtailed.



It is one of our teacher's responsibilities to help prepare children to adjust to the outside world. Therefore the teacher must help the child make as easy a transition as possible. The teacher will prepare the children for the change by helping them to adjust to the difference in work style and by preparing them for the change in rules that will be part of the new environment.

Another important point is that the later the children transfer from our school the better the adjustment. They are more mature, have a deeper love of learning, and have more self-confidence in the classroom.

A new environment always demands change and it may take the children a while to adjust to a new environment. But once they get used to new procedures and new expectations they should be fine. If the children have truly benefited from the Montessori environment they will have developed inner discipline and a sense of responsibility. They will want to do what is right more because it feels good and less because they are fearful of the results of doing wrong.

This translates into the ability to listen and follow instructions. If the children know how to do this they should be fine in any environment. Montessori education aspires to develop people who are responsible and concerned individuals, people who are aware that they are a part of the universal family of man. These people are not only able to make an adjustment to a new environment but they are an asset wherever they are.

## The Secret of Good Teaching

 *The secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination. Our aim therefore 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 inmost core. We do not want complacent pupils, but eager ones; we seek to sow life in the child rather than theories, to help him in his growth, mental and emotional as well as physical, and for that we must offer grand and lofty ideas to the human mind which we find ever ready to receive them, demanding more and more.* 

**-- Maria Montessori**  
*To Educate the Human Potential*