

CASA Procedures and Answers to FAQs

2011-2012

Please take some time to read information that will help you prepare for the start of school this month.

ATTENDANCE & FUNDING

Your child's K-8 education funding for the entire school year is directly tied to the number of days your child attends for the first twenty days of the school year. The first twenty days this year are **Monday, July 25 through Friday, August 19.**

School funding is based on student membership for the first 20 days of school. Students can not be included in membership until they physically show up and attend class. Enrolling your student in the school does NOT qualify as membership. For this reason, **attendance on the FIRST DAY of school is a CRITICAL part of annual funding for Casa Esperanza Montessori.**

If your charter student (grades K-8) is absent during that time for two days, we lose 10% of the state education funding for your child for the entire school year. **Attendance is important academically all year round; during these twenty days, it is also financially critical to Casa Esperanza that students attend. Thank you for supporting your child's education both academically and financially.**

Calendar

The **on-line** Casa Esperanza Family Calendar shows the year by month, week or day, including notes with detailed information about specific events.

We encourage you to visit the school website for the most up-to-date information about school-wide programming.

You can reach this site by clicking on the school website calendar tab at <http://www.cemcs.org>.

No login or password is necessary to access this calendar, even though you may see that prompt for the site administrators.

Meet the Teacher Day and Parent Orientation

We look forward to seeing you at the Meet the Teacher Day and the Parent Orientation on **Friday, July 22nd.**

SCHEDULE for Meet the Teacher Day & Parent Orientation

9:00 am (CH & CHLE) Children's House
10:00 am (LE & LEUE) Lower Elementary
11:00 am (UE) Upper Elementary
1:00 pm (MG) Middle Grades

If possible, we encourage parents to attend this event with only the Casa student so the parent may focus on that specific student's acclimation to a new classroom, teacher, school, and peer group for the year.

On Meet the Teacher Day, children may familiarize themselves with the classroom and the bathrooms, and practice saying good-bye on the front school sidewalk a few times so they will be better prepared for their first morning of school.

First Day of school

For all kindergarten through eighth-grade students is **Monday, July 25**. Please see the school calendar for the first attendance day for your preschooler.

Montessori education encourages children to be independent. **Please allow your child to walk to the classroom after saying good-bye to you in the carpool line or at the front door of the school building.** Your child will see many other children, even three-year-olds, doing exactly the same thing. If you think your child may be concerned about separating from you, we suggest you tell your child ahead of time, "One kiss, one hug, I know you'll make it a great day at school today! Good-bye; I'll see you at 3:00." You can also practice this skill and a practice carpool drive through on Meet the Teacher Day.

While it is important for children to say good-bye to their parents, it is equally important that the parent be firm, say good-bye, and then walk out of view of the child. You are always welcome to wait outside around the front door corner (out of sight) until your child has gone back to class; you are also invited on the first day to call the front office to check on your child's progress adjusting during the day.

If a child has difficulty separating during the first day or two weeks of school, Casa provides "ambassadors" to help escort the child back to class. Be aware that younger children may initially separate easily and then be more resistant once they discover "going to school" is a daily event.

Book Fees

\$100.00 per student in grades K-8

These fees pay for students' math, word problems, spelling, penmanship, writing, science, Spanish, and other consumable books.

Checks may be made to **Casa Esperanza Montessori** or **CEMCS**: We do accept cash with correct change. We cannot accept credit card payments.

These fees are payable in advance of the beginning of the school year; you may pay them by mail or at the Meet the Teacher Day & Parent Orientation.

Communication

Over the summer, it may take several days for us to get back to you if you have questions, but once school starts, our response time to your questions will be within 24 hours of the receipt of the communication.

At the end of most weeks, we will send home the **Family Communication Folder** (aka "Friday Folder") that includes communication from the school, communication from the PFA, and the child's weekly work plans so you will know how your child is doing in the classroom. We ask that **you read the information, sign the folder, and return the folder on the following Monday.**

We will also be sending home a monthly classroom newsletter electronically via our classroom e-mail list. Family folders are issued to students the first week of school. Folder replacements are available at the front office.

Uniform Policy

The uniform policy is in this packet, in your Parent Handbook under Uniform Policy, and on the school's website <http://www.cemcs.org/policy-procedure>. Please note: **high-heels, Crocs® and other types of slip-on shoes do not meet our dress code**; please do not send your child to school in these shoes. Please send them in supportive laced or Velcro shoes in which they can run and play (tennis shoes preferred). Please leave umbrellas at home; we do not use them at school and they are easily turned into poking tools or tripping sticks.

NOTE: The Middle Grades student uniform is different from that of Lower School students. Middle Grades students also wear PE uniforms.

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

- 7:30 Early morning, prearranged, tuition-based childcare opens
- 8:05 Carpool begins (school doors unlocked)**
- 8:25 Attendance is taken in classrooms; students marked absent or tardy
- 3:00 Walk-up** carpool numbers called at the front door of the school at for 15 minutes only (*If you would like your child to be a walk-up, please come to the front office to fill out a Walk-up Dismissal form*)
- Afternoon Carpool begins**
- 3:30 Afternoon Carpool ends (*carpool takes longer at beginning of school year and on rainy days*)
- Afternoon, prearranged, tuition-based childcare opens
- 3:35 \$1 per minute per family pick-up fee begins
- 3:45 Students not picked up are taken to childcare; \$1 per minute per family fee still in effect until parent picks up student(s)
- 6:00 Afternoon childcare ends
- 6:00 \$1 per minute per student late pick-up fee begins

We begin each day promptly, and teachers are in the classroom to welcome children beginning at 8:05 a.m. Late-arriving children "behind" for the remainder of the day. Help get your child off to a successful start and come to school on time. If your child arrives at the front door at **8:20**, s/he will be late getting to class. ***A child who is not in the classroom at 8:20 a.m. is marked tardy.*** **Whether absences are excused or unexcused, they have an adverse effect on a student's education progress and may be cause for retention.**

Setting a daily routine is important, especially during the first few weeks of school and we appreciate your assistance with this matter. Developing the habit of regular attendance and respect for others by arriving and departing at the proper times needs to begin at the start of the school year and continue throughout the entire year.

Excuse notes must be turned in to the school office within three days of the student's last day of absence. Under State Board of Education policy, traffic conditions are not excusable reasons for absence or tardiness.

If you need to speak with a classroom teacher, please wait to go back to the classroom area of the school until carpool ends at 3:30ish so that during carpool we may direct all our attention and conversation to the children's safety. Most classroom doors are locked during afternoon carpool. **Please do not try to meet with your child's teacher "for just a minute" during morning or afternoon carpool – s/he is focusing on greeting students and student safety at these times. Thank you.**

Medication Administration

School employees will administer both prescribed and over the counter medication to students. The “**Prescribed Medication Administration**” form must be filled out by the student’s physician, signed by the Head of the School, and be filed in the school office. The pharmacist’s label on prescription medications serves as the physician’s order. All prescription medications must have a pharmacy label which clearly indicates the student’s name, name of medication, date the prescription was filled and directions clearly marked.

For over the counter medication, the parent/guardian of the student must fill out the “**Medication Administration**” form, signed by the Head of School, and filed in the school office.

NOTE: Please know that students are not allowed to keep any prescribed or over the counter medication inside their backpacks. All medications must be administered by an administrator.

Medication forms are available to download on the school’s web-site at:
<http://www.cemcs.org/forms/medication-administration>

CARPOOL

Carpool Tags

Returning Families will keep the same Carpool Tag number. New Families will be given a new Carpool Tag Number before the first day of school. Returning Families with a new PreK or Kindergarten student will have the same Carpool Number of the current sibling attending at Casa. ***If you would like to order an additional Carpool Tag or would like a new number due to stolen or lost tag, it is \$5.00 per tag. The **Carpool Tag Order** form is available at the front office or you can download it from our web-site at: <http://www.cemcs.org/carpool>

Walk-ups

Walk-up Carpool begins exactly at 3:00 pm and will end at 3:15 pm. Walk-ups are for **every day ONLY**. Your child cannot be a walk-up on random days. In order for a student to be a walk-up, you must fill out the **Walk-up Dismissal Form** that is available in the front office or you can download it from our web-site at: <http://www.cemcs.org/carpool>. Please fill out the form, sign it and turn it in to the front office. **Walk-up adult must present a carpool tag or a photo ID.** If you do not have either, we will not release any child to you.

Early Release Days

Carpool begins at **12:00** on early release days.

Checking Students Out of School During the School Day

Sometimes families need to check students out during the school day. **Please do so prior or by 2:30 p.m.** so that you do not have to wait until the end of carpool to collect your student.

SAFETY

Visiting Campus

All non-staff members (including parents, community members, facility repair persons, and volunteers) are considered visitors to campus and are expected to sign in and out in the front office and wear a visitor sticker when on campus during the school day. Casa also has policies when visitors to campus become disruptive. These policies help ensure the safety of all persons on campus and are in the Parent Information Handbook.

Doors

With the exception of recess doors, which will be unlocked during recess when an adult is on the recess patio, exterior doors remain locked during the school day. Please do not prop school doors open unless you personally stand next to the door and monitor traffic until you reclose the door. Classroom doors are often locked during afternoon carpool.

Crisis Plan/Emergency Drills

Casa has a school crisis plan on file with the Raleigh Police Department. Staff hold crisis/emergency drills monthly. Should our building become uninhabitable during the school day, students will be relocated to the Grace Community Church behind the school

FOOD at Casa Esperanza Montessori Charter School

Please pack the entirety of your child's snack and lunch, including utensils, napkins, and dishes. If you would like to send your child with a warm snack/lunch, please warm it at home and send it in a thermos. Please send cool foods with ice packs in lunch boxes. We cannot guarantee access to a microwave or refrigerator during the school day.

Weekly catered-lunch option

Please look for a flyer later this summer about catered lunches from Panera. This Casa Middle Grades student-run business and fundraiser helps fund Middle Grades projects and long-distance field trips.

Breakfast:

Please make sure that your child eats a healthy breakfast before school; eating a healthy breakfast greatly improves school performance.

Snack:

Each elementary and middle grades child will be asked to bring an individual daily snack. Children's House snack is provided by parents for the whole classroom, one week at a time. Children choose snack as a work in their work cycle and may eat snack, within certain parameters, when they are hungry. Your teacher can provide a list of healthy snacks that are acceptable in a Montessori environment.

Lunch:

Good nutrition and healthy living are integral parts of the Montessori curriculum. We eat lunch as a group. We encourage children to bring nutritious lunches which include fresh fruits and vegetables, protein, whole grain breads, and water or milk in a thermos. Try to make sure your child's lunch contains a food from each of the food groups. Items such as chips, sodas, Cheetos, and candy that contain refined sugar, preservatives, and artificial colors preservatives tend to zap our energy quickly, and we want the best from your child for the whole school day.

Candy, gum, cupcakes, fast food items, and cake-like products, soda and carbonated beverages are not allowed in the classroom. Help us help your child develop healthy school lunch habits.

*We encourage you to pack lunches in reusable or recyclable containers. Please send in reusable cutlery when needed. We will use cloth napkins. Our goal is a trash-free lunch. **We send home unconsumed food portions and trash at the end of the school day to help you gauge what your child eats and what s/he leaves behind. You are welcome to include a grocery bag in your students' lunch box to contain lunch leftovers and trash if you wish.***

School Supplies

Parents should purchase student school supplies and send them to school after labeling each requested supply item; school supply lists are included in this information packet.

Observations

Parents will be invited to observe or assist in the classroom after Friday, August 26; before that time, students and teachers are taking time to build their classroom community as it needs to function (without extra adults) through much of the school year. Thank you for giving them the time to set their group expectations and to get to know each other during the first month of school. If you would like to observe, please sign up on the observation calendar in the front office and take a moment to read the observation guidelines. These guidelines are included at the end of this information packet.

VOLUNTEERING

We are so glad that your family is a part of the Casa community. You have chosen a truly special place to educate your child, and we look forward to personally welcoming you and your child into the Casa family. You will have many opportunities to be actively involved in your child's education. A few of the opportunities that will be available in our classroom this year are:

- Helping set up the classroom during **July 18-22**
- **Carpool volunteers (our entire carpool is volunteer-managed)**
- Helping children with reading and writing activities
- Cleaning of the classroom
- Volunteering to come to class and be a "visiting expert" on a topic
- Playground and lunchtime supervision of children
- Helping children in other areas of the curriculum
- Care of classroom animals or plants over long breaks
- Substituting when a teacher needs to be out
- Participating in Parent Faculty Association activities

- Serving on Board of Director's Committees
- Scholastic book coordinator
- Room parent
- Field Trip Coordinator

Please sign up on the Volunteer Sheets at the Meet the Teacher Day and Parent Orientation. These sheets also remain in the front office for the entire school year.

There will be many other opportunities for you to be involved with our school. We would also love to know about any special talents or abilities that you would like to share with the children. This can be any kind of talent, such as creating art, playing an instrument, and storytelling. We truly enjoy having people come into the classroom to share things with the children.

We hope you enjoy the rest of your summer, and we look forward to seeing you at the Meet the Teacher's Day and Parent Orientation in July!

Best Regards,

The Faculty and Staff of Casa Esperanza Montessori



"One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child."

--Maria Montessori

Casa Esperanza Montessori does not discriminate against any student on the basis of ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual preference, or disability. Except as provided by law or the mission of the school as set out in the charter, the school shall not limit admission on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude, athletic ability, disability, race, creed, gender, national origin, religion, or ancestry.

A General Guide to Observation in a Montessori Environment

We welcome your visit to our classroom. The parent observation is an opportunity for you to get a glimpse of what life is like in a Montessori classroom. This may be your first exposure to the Montessori experience, your first time at our school, or you may be here to find out more about your child's day. In order to give you as clear a picture as possible, we ask that you observe the following procedure. We also offer hints for observing and interpreting what you see. Please continue reading for specific guidelines on observing a Children's House (ages 3-6) or Elementary and Middle Grades (ages 6-14) classroom.

Observations may begin the fourth week of August.

Observations may be scheduled by appointment only. Please be on time and allow approximately 30 minutes observation time for each class.

Please note that classroom observations are for parents only. The number of adults per visit is limited to lessen the distraction in the classroom.

Please call the Casa Esperanza Montessori office at 855.9811x401 to schedule a classroom observation.

Your behavior as an adult and an observer while in the classroom:

1. Please seat yourself where the classroom directress requests and become as unobtrusive as possible. Please refrain from moving about the room or hugging, kissing, or waving at children, including your own, while observing. If a child looks at you, smile and then casually divert your eyes so that it does not appear that you are observing him/her.
2. If children begin to speak to you, try not to engage them in conversation, but politely say to them, "Please continue with your work. I am here to see what your classroom is like when children are working."
3. Any child's behavior may be a reaction to your presence in the room. This is particularly true of your own child. Please observe the class as a whole. If your presence in the classroom causes any child to be overly distracted, a faculty member may request that you come back to observe next month when the children are more prepared for your presence.

Summary Checklist of what to Look for in a Montessori Environment

1. Are the children involved and interacting with the materials? Are the majority of the children absorbed in what they are doing?
2. Are the children treated with respect?
3. Do the adults listen to the children?
4. Do the adults respect the child's work and encourage the children?
5. Are the learning materials easily available to the children? Do they seem appropriate?
6. Are the children working for their own satisfaction rather than external reward systems such as stickers, smiley faces, grades, etc?
7. Is some of the day spent on individual activities (those of the children's choosing) and some on group activities?
8. Are activities initiated by the children and by the directress or director?
9. How much do the children do for themselves and how much is done for them? Is independence fostered?
10. Is there a quiet hum of activity?
11. Do the children appear relaxed and secure?
12. Does the classroom environment appear attractive and orderly?
13. Is there a place for everything? Do the children put their work "back in its place?"
14. Does the appearance and manner of the directress or director suggest professionalism?
15. If you were a child, would you want to be in this classroom?

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A specific guide to observation in the Children's House Classroom

When you enter the classroom, you will be shown to an adult-sized chair. Please be seated and wait for the teacher to speak to you. When you sit down, children may come up to you. Please try not to engage them in conversation. If children speak to you first, a polite "Hello" and a direct response as to who you are is fine; then quietly ask the child to return to work. The children understand that observers come to watch them working and they will understand your response in that context.

If your own child cries or clings or is silly or ignores you completely, do not be surprised. Children respond differently to having their parents in the classroom than they do in the normal course of the school day or at home.

The teacher will not be able to take time from her teaching duties to converse with you during or immediately after your observation. If questions occur to you while you are watching, please write them down. The teacher or administrator will be glad to answer these questions by telephone or in person. Please check with the front desk to set up a mutually convenient time to have your questions answered.

Some Hints on Observing:

We have found it helpful to offer a guide to observing and interpreting the dynamics of the Montessori classroom. Many parents, upon first entering the environment when it is abuzz with children, feel overwhelmed by the diverse activities that are going on. The suggestions below are intended to be a focus point for your attention.

Visual Perspective: Try to observe in a context - alternate between a wide-angled view of the entire classroom and a focus on a particular child.

There is more to the Montessori classroom than the activities of one particular child. Naturally, the first tendency of parents is to focus and follow their own child's activities. First time observers may be attracted to one child or a group of the oldest or youngest children. **Auditory Perspective:** Listen to the noise level as it rises and falls. Try to see which groups or individual children are generating the sound. You will hear the normal hubbub of children being together and the special pitch of the children being excited about learning. At times there will be a special peak of excitement of discovery. See if you can differentiate.

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Learning: Notice that children learn in different ways. With some types of materials you will see groups of children working cooperatively, and with others you will find an individual child working alone intensely. Still other children are walking through the classroom seemingly not engaged in any direct activity. Very often, this last type of child is engaged in actively absorbing information through observation of the children and the materials in the classroom. It will help if you alternate your focus on these three learning patterns. Note the ease and joy with which the children work. You will see the intense self-gratification that the learning process affords the child.

Child-child Interaction: Listen to the way - the child and the content - in which children talk to each other. Listen for the level of respect as well as for the normal pushes and pulls of childhood.

Very often observers new to Montessori are surprised that a child will zealously guard his/her work and tell another classmate that they are disturbing this work, and that, as a result of this verbal communication, the other child will leave. Other new observers are bemused by the politeness with which one child asks another if s/he would "care for a piece of banana" and the other responds, "Yes, please."

Teacher-child interaction: Watch the way teachers interact with children and compare it with the traditional classroom mode by which you were probably educated. There is a basic respect for each individual child's particular style of learning in the Montessori classroom.

Notice the way in which a teacher corrects a child, and look at the instances in which she does not. Listen to the teacher's tone of voice with the child. Many parents have asked how one directress can "handle" a group of 36 or more children. The answer lies within this interaction process. The directress is a facilitator of the child's autonomous learning process. She guides rather than insists. She prepares the environment, gives the child the tools to utilize the materials and then does whatever else is necessary to help the child interact with the environment without assistance. Sometimes this involves direct encouragement, at other times indirect appreciation, and even judicious absence.

Sociability: Watch the ways in which the children offer assistance to one another - with the materials and with everyday tasks - and the ways that they are directly sociable with one another. The snack table is a good area to keep an eye on to see this dynamic.

The Montessori classroom contains a wide range of ages of children and materials that are appropriate to the different developmental levels. Note how the children go to the materials that are appropriate to their developmental level and how the younger children absorb the older children's work simply by being near them, and how, conversely, the older children will assist the younger ones with work that they have already mastered. These seeming "academic" activities have a strong social component to them - one that inculcates a sense of responsibility for and community with all those in the class.

There are always pockets of purely social activity present in any Montessori classroom as the child's natural desire to form friendships and be part of an ongoing community is ever present.

Autonomy: Absorb the independence of the children as they do for themselves in the classroom environment.

Watch how even the youngest child takes responsibility for his/her personal environment. Watch how, however precariously, a glass pitcher of water or a tray with fragile materials on it is carried. Watch as a child chooses a piece of work, takes it from the shelf, completes the work, and returns it to its place so that the next child can use it.

The generation of autonomy is a function of the prepared environment of the Montessori classroom. What this means is that the child will have available all needed materials, in good working order, to complete a task that has usually been self chosen. The structure of Montessori provides the child with as much time as s/he needs to complete the task to his/her satisfaction, and success is the primary reward. As you look around the classroom notice the materials, how attractive they are in placement, color, cleanliness, quality, etc. The child is attracted to learn by this environment.

Conclusion: You may not be able to sort out and see all the dimensions of the classroom that are outlined above, and we hope that you are not disappointed if you discover that all aspects of the classroom have either not been present during your observation or that you did not see it all. We know that learning how to "read" the Montessori classroom is difficult at first, but we know that with each successive visit your observation skills will become sharper. We look forward to your next visit to the classroom and are eager to share with you the excitement that we feel in being a part of your child's growing years.

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A Guide to Observation in the Elementary/Middle Grades Classroom

When you enter the classroom, you will be shown to an adult-sized chair. Please be seated. When you sit down, children may come up to you. Please try not to engage them in conversation. If children speak to you first, a polite "Hello" and a direct response as to who you are is fine; then quietly ask the child to return to work. The children understand that observers come to watch them working and they will understand your response in that context.

If your own child cries, clings or is silly or ignores you completely, do not be surprised. Children respond differently to having their parents in the classroom than they do in the normal course of the school day or at home.

The teacher will not be able to take time from her teaching duties to converse with you during or immediately after your observation. If questions occur to you while you are watching, please write them down. The teacher or administrator will be glad to answer these questions by telephone or in person. Please check with the front desk to set up a mutually convenient time to have your questions answered.

Some Hints on Observing

Visual Perspective: Try to observe in a context - alternate between a wide-angled view of the entire classroom and a focus on a particular child.

There is more to the Montessori classroom than the activities of one particular child. Naturally, the first tendency of parents is to focus and follow their own child's activities. First time observers may be attracted to one child or a group of the oldest or youngest children. Auditory Perspective: Listen to the noise level as it rises and falls. Try to see which groups or individual children are generating the sound. You will hear the normal hubbub of children being together and the special pitch of the children being excited about learning. At times there will be a special peak of excitement of discovery. See if you can differentiate.

Learning: Notice that children learn in different ways. With some types of materials you will see groups of children working cooperatively, and with others you will find an individual child working alone intensely. Still other children are walking through the classroom seemingly not engaged in any direct activity. Very often, this last type of child is engaged in actively absorbing information through observation of the children and the materials in the classroom. It will help if you alternate your focus on these three learning patterns.

Note the ease and joy with which the children work. You will see the intense self-gratification that the learning process affords the child. If your child has experienced a Primary Montessori education, you will notice the different behavior patterns in the Elementary/Middle Grades student. While Primary students are focused on "process," Elementary and Middle Grades students become aware of "finished accomplishment and product" as well.

Watch the way teachers interact with children and compare it with the traditional classroom mode by which you were probably educated. Notice the way in which a teacher corrects a child, and look at the instances in which she does not. Listen to the teacher's tone of voice with the child.

The directress is a facilitator of the child's autonomous learning process. She guides rather than insists. She prepares the environment, gives the child the tools to utilize the materials and then does whatever else is necessary to help the child interact with the environment without assistance. Sometimes this involves direct encouragement, at other times indirect appreciation, and even a judicious absence. There is a basic respect for each individual child's particular style of learning in the Montessori classroom.

Sociability: Watch the ways in which the children offer assistance to one another - with the materials and with everyday tasks - and the ways that they are directly sociable with one another.

The Montessori classroom contains a wide range of both ages of children and of materials that are appropriate to the different developmental levels. Note how the children go to the materials that are appropriate to their developmental level. Note also how the younger children absorb the older children's work simply by being near them, and how, conversely, the older children will assist the younger ones with work that they have already mastered.

These activities have a strong social component to them - one that inculcates a sense of responsibility for and community with all those in the class. There are always pockets of purely social activity present in any Montessori classroom as the child's natural desire to form friendships and be part of an ongoing community is ever present.

Autonomy: The generation of autonomy is a function of the prepared environment of the Montessori classroom. What this means is that the child will have available all needed materials, in good working order, to complete a task that has usually been self chosen. The structure of Montessori provides the child with as much time as s/he needs to complete the task. Elementary and Middle Grades students have assigned work as well as free choice in their academic presentations. It is their responsibility to stay focused and current with their assignments.

Conclusion: It may be challenging to sort out and see all the dimensions of the classroom that are outlined above, and we hope that you are not disappointed if you discover that all aspects of the classroom have either not been present during your observation or that you did not see it all. We know that learning how to "read" the Montessori classroom is difficult at first, but we know that with each successive visit your observation skills will become sharper. We look forward to your next visit to the classroom and are eager to share with you the excitement that we feel in being a part of your child's growing years.

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