



GEIST
MONTESSORI
ACADEMY

Pre-K Family Handbook
2022-2023

Mission Statement

The mission of Geist Montessori Academy Pre-K is to provide an environment where all can develop to their highest individual potential: academically, emotionally, physically, morally and socially.

Educational Philosophy

Geist Montessori Academy Pre-K is a non-profit corporation which operates a school, providing a Montessori curriculum. The primary purpose of the School is to educate the whole child: academically, socially, intellectually, emotionally and physically. The activities of the school are designed to develop the whole individual and are intended to benefit not only the child, but the family and the community as well. We offer a Montessori education for children ages three to five years.

The Montessori curriculum includes the areas of Practical Life (learning the necessities of life functions), Sensorial (education and refinement of the five senses), Language, Mathematics, Cultural (Biology, Zoology, Environmental Science, History), Music, Art and Physical Education. These take place within an approximate three hour work cycle.

Dr. Maria Montessori was a physician and anthropologist who, through careful study of children, developed the method of teaching eventually known as the Montessori Method. It is highly compatible with today's educational focus on developmentally appropriate practice and cognitive research. Montessori schools concentrate on following the development of the child through various stages. Concentrating on specific capacities in each stage helps the child to develop fully. Dr. Montessori referred to the time frames involved in the child's development of a definitive ability as Sensitive Periods. These are transitory time periods in which the child appears to be working on one specific area of development to the exclusion of others. Tremendous power and interest are concentrated on the development of one's capacity.

A child experiences Sensitive Periods for walking and talking, followed by discovering the order in the environment, attention to precision, interest in minute objects, counting objects, alphabet sounds, language, etc. After the intensity of activity inspired in a Sensitive Period, children do not appear fatigued. Rather, they seem satisfied, calm, and rested. Today's research on the brain shows that a child can change the physiology of the brain through interacting with the environment at specific stages of development.

Geist Montessori Academy Pre-K (GMA) offers children the opportunity to develop in a noncompetitive, peaceful and friendly environment. Different areas of study allow a child to satisfy his need for development in Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Mathematics and Cultural Studies. All the various areas of hands-on manipulatives that the child can touch, feel, experience and repeat.

Dr. Montessori believed that it is the hand operating with the brain that creates the child's intellect. She called the hand "the instrument of the intelligence". One of the educational tenets of Montessori education is that we should never give to the brain more than we give to the hand; they compose a "two-fold creative activity".

A majority of the classroom materials have more than one function or purpose. In all the classes, children may start with lessons that simply allow them to feel, see or smell. They continue with the lessons that encourage classifying and categorizing, as well as guiding language and mathematical function. The Montessori materials themselves are

designed to be auto-educational. In essence, the child teaches himself, under the direction of a Montessori director or teacher. Children move through the work from the simple to the complex.

GMA provides both an academic benefit and a societal benefit. The classrooms, which contain a mixed age group of children, create within itself a positive “influence of society” for the children within the classroom. Children are given the freedom to move about and talk with each other when appropriate. The environment purposefully consists of only one set of each group of materials in the classroom. A child must wait until another has finished his work and put the material back in its place before he can take it himself. They then exercise patience and respect for others. All these little things help develop sympathy and understanding, which gradually brings a real harmony that cannot be given artificially. This fosters independent learning in both the primary and elementary levels and leads to cultivation of time management skills and research skills in the elementary.

Another aspect of Dr. Montessori’s insight into human development is the child’s need to survive in this environment. In a Montessori classroom the children do “real” work of gardening, polishing silver, glass, shoes, wood, washing furniture, washing and ironing clothes. They also perfect all necessary skills to dress themselves and learn how to prepare food and serve each other. This “real” work establishes the proof of their ability to survive in their environment. This need for survival is biological and cannot be touched by an adult’s words. Only by “doing” can this foundation be built and reinforced. Thus, you see emerging a secure human being able to assume his place in society as a responsible, productive person.

Educational Approach

Curriculum

The curriculum used at GMA begins with the Montessori curriculum as the framework, and then correlates with the Indiana State Standards and the Core Knowledge Foundation Curriculum. These three documents are referenced and cross referenced in order to prevent repetitions or gaps in instruction. The curriculum begins with a solid foundation in basic knowledge (facts) and then encourages the students to apply this knowledge to new situations, analyze all parts, synthesize this information into something new, and finally evaluate or judge the value of the new situation using past experiences and newly forming criteria. This process provides a solid basis on which to build skills, instruction and understanding. The curriculum offers a coherent plan that builds year by year.

Classroom Size

A Montessori class, especially at the pre-K level, may seem very large at first to many parents. Each pre-K class will serve 25-30 children, spanning three or four age levels, normally more or less evenly divided between boys and girls among the age levels. The classes are taught by a trained Montessori educator working with one or two assistants.

Parents and traditional early childhood educators often begin by questioning our large group sizes and Montessori’s tradition of working with three or four different age groups in the same class. The answer lies in the fundamental difference in our perception of how children can be best helped to learn. Traditionally, parents and educators have

assumed that the classroom teacher is the source of instruction. By this reasoning, the lower the pupil/teacher ratio, the more time an individual child can receive and the better the educational experience.

The facts shown by a number of studies are that, except where ratios fall as low as four to one or when they climb to more than forty students in a room, research has not been able to find that class size in itself is the link with effective teaching. As any parent who has worked with five to ten children will attest, each individual child is a real person with a demanding set of expectations, opinions, interests and needs. In a traditional classroom, whether teachers work with ten children or twenty five, they often spend most of their time talking to the entire class or working with one or two children at a time while the other children listen, daydream or sleep. Teacher time can be a very limited resource.

The most effective teachers succeed not because their classes are smaller, but because they have found teaching strategies that really work. They allow excellent teachers, no matter in what setting they teach, to individualize instruction and facilitate learning for the entire class while they focus their attention on a few children at a time.

Parents and teachers sometimes dream about classes that are essentially one-on-one tutorial situations. But the best teacher of a three year old is often another child who is just a little bit older and has mastered a skill. This process is good for both the tutor and the younger child. In this situation, the teacher is not the primary focus.

The larger group size in the Montessori class puts the focus less on the adult and encourages children to learn from one another. By having enough children in each age group, all students will find others at their developmental level. In this way, the resource of the highly trained Montessori educator is used much more efficiently than teachers in other schools. Also, we have to remember that the Montessori classroom is a carefully prepared environment, filled with fascinating self-correcting educational materials. They allow children to work independently in a way that no school that is heavily dependent on texts and workbooks can.

Montessori classes are organized to encompass a multi-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. Some parents worry that by having younger children in the same class as older ones, one group or the other will be short changed. They fear that the younger children will absorb the teacher's time and attention, or that the importance of covering the kindergarten curriculum for the five year olds will prevent them 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, three or four years allows students to develop a strong sense of community with their classmates and teachers. The age range also allows the especially gifted child the stimulation of intellectual peers, without requiring that he/she skip a grade and feel emotionally out of place.

By consciously bringing children together in a group that is large enough to allow for two-thirds of the children to return every year, the school environment promotes continuity and the development of a very different level of relationship between the children and their peers, as well as between children and their teachers. Classes tend to

be fairly stable communities, with only the oldest third moving on to the next level each year.

Classroom Design

Montessori classrooms provide a prepared environment where children are free to respond to their natural tendency to work. The children's innate passion for learning is encouraged by giving them opportunities to engage in spontaneous, purposeful activities with the guidance of a trained teacher. Within a framework of order, the children learn concentration and joyful self-discipline. They progress at their own pace and rhythm, according to their individual capabilities. This environment allows them the opportunity to become human beings able to function independently and interdependently.

Phonetic Approach to Reading

We use a phonetic approach to reading. Initially, the child is helped to identify sounds. Next, tactile and muscle memory is employed by having the child trace large sandpaper letters to learn the symbol of each consonant and short vowel. In a steady progression, the phonemes of our languages are introduced so the child is able to master each, thus building a solid foundation. This mastery ensures greater attack skills, confidence and a love of reading. Names of the letters are introduced after the child is into long vowel work.

Professional Growth

GMA encourages the professional growth of all staff members. Workshops, conferences and seminars are attended whenever possible. Regular staff meetings include opportunities for ongoing training and sharing of relevant information. School closings may be scheduled for teacher in-services and professional growth workshops in which the entire faculty is involved. The pre-K program follows our GMA school calendar and will be closed on Professional Development days.

Administrative Policies and Procedures

Admissions

GMA welcomes all students regardless of race, religion, national origin or gender. Please see the Non-discriminatory Policy.

Children must be at least three years old *and* fully potty trained to begin attending GMA. Children who turn five years old prior to August 1 of the current school year are eligible for enrollment in Kindergarten. It is not necessary for a child to have previous Montessori experience in order to enroll at GMA. Our teachers will work with each student to help them adjust to a Montessori learning environment.

Enrollment

All enrollment forms are due prior to a student's first day of school. The required forms include:

- Tuition Fees Form
- Enrollment Form
- Student Health Information Form
- Copy of original birth certificate
- Proof of Immunizations

A non-refundable \$225 deposit is due at the time of enrollment. The first month's tuition must be paid in full prior to a child's first day of school.

Students who enroll after the first day of the month will be charged a prorated tuition for that month.

Immunizations need to be up to date and it is the responsibility of the parent(s)/guardian to notify the office of any updated vaccinations for their child during the year.

Withdrawal

Families must provide a minimum of two-weeks notice in the event they choose to withdraw their child from GMA. Tuition payments made on a monthly basis will not be refunded. Only a prorated refund of tuition paid semi-annually or annually will be refunded at the time of withdrawal. Enrollment and material fees are non-refundable.

New Student Probation Period

Each child entering GMA will start under a 60 day probationary period. It generally takes six weeks for a child to adjust to the routine of his/her class. During this six week time frame if a student appears to have a behavioral, social or medical problem beyond the normal scope of the classroom, the teacher(s) will consult with each other as a team, in order to assess the situation. The teachers will then observe the child in the classroom. If it is determined that there is a serious problem that needs further intervention, the parent(s)/guardian will be asked to participate in a conference with the teacher(s) and the Executive Director of Geist Montessori Academy to discuss the situation. If the behavior continues, the child will be asked to leave the program.

Tuition and Billing

The tuition may be paid in full, with a 3% discount offered for annual payment made before the child's first day of school, or in monthly installments. If the monthly installment plan is chosen, the annual payment is divided into equal payments. The first of ten equal installments will begin in August and end in May. Monthly tuition is to be paid via our online payment system or via check by the first of the month. A \$35 late fee will be assessed if the payment is not received by the 7th of the month. Should a student's tuition go more than 60 days late, the student may be removed from the program until tuition is brought current.

The 2022-2023 monthly tuition for full day programming is \$980. Half-day tuition is \$675 per month.

Transfer Records

Student records will not be released if the account is not paid in full.

Discipline

Our pre-K program will follow the school behavior and discipline policies outlined in the GMA Family Handbook.

Home/School Communication

Conferences

Parent/Teacher conferences will be held twice each school year (once in the fall and

once in the spring). Conferences are designed to keep parents up-to-date on their child's activities and progress in the classroom.

All students are released from school early for Parent/Teacher Conferences. Pre-K students will be released at 11:30am, following regular carline procedures.

Newsletters

Bi-weekly classroom newsletters will be sent home via email. Please read them carefully as they contain information on school events, classroom activities, field trips, and general information. *The GMA Gazette* is sent out on the opposite bi-weekly schedule from Geist Montessori Academy administration.

Parent Involvement

Teachers will inform parents of opportunities to volunteer in the classroom as they become available. All volunteers must have a completed and cleared Criminal History Background Check on file with the school office before being permitted to help in the classroom or at school events. Volunteer background checks must be completed each school year as they do not rollover from year to year.

Social Media Policy

Social media has rapidly become a source of information and connection for many in our community. Geist Montessori Academy recognizes the important role that social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter play in the distribution of information. We encourage community members to utilize these sites to stay informed and to connect with other members of our school community.

GMA operates one official school Facebook page and one official school Twitter account, which can be found at www.Facebook.com/GeistMontessoriAcademy and on Twitter as [@academy_geist](https://twitter.com/academy_geist). Information posted on these pages, can be deemed reliable and accurate as it is posted by school leadership. Any other pages or groups using the name Geist Montessori Academy or GMA are not official school sanctioned pages, and the information is not always reliable or accurate. These pages and groups are monitored by members of our school community. Any inflammatory, inaccurate, or derogatory posts or comments on these pages will be reported and addressed by school leadership.

We ask that you respect the privacy and the feelings of others. Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about students, parents, school personnel, or the school in general. Your posts and comments should help build and support the school community.

These sites are not for letting the school know of:

- Student absences or health related concerns
- Classroom concerns, please contact your child's teacher directly
- Concerns regarding the school in general, car line procedures, policies, etc.

We encourage families and community members to go to the source for the most accurate and up-to-date information about GMA. If you have a question or concern about something school-related, please contact the school to discuss these things.

Inappropriate use of social media can have a detrimental impact on the school and potentially your child's education while not giving the school the opportunity to address concerns. GMA regularly monitors social media sites to protect the school community. Violations of these social media policies and guidelines may include removal of posts, removal from the forum/group, and could warrant a conversation about whether or not our school community is the best fit for your family.

Guidelines

As we all work together to create a school community that fosters kindness, respect, and responsibility for all people, we understand that social media provides individuals with increased opportunities to communicate, collaborate, and create connections with others. The following guidelines are meant to help individuals represent the GMA school community well in the digital world.

Please:

- Use good judgment.
- Always treat others in a respectful, positive and considerate manner.
- Be responsible and ethical.
- Follow the same guidelines for respectful, responsible behavior online that you would follow face-to-face.
- Encourage positive, constructive discussion to use communicative or collaborative technologies.
- Alert your child's classroom teacher or other staff member if you see threatening/bullying, inappropriate, inaccurate, or harmful content (images, messages, posts) online.

Please don't:

- Share confidential information. No personally identifiable student information may be posted.
- Any discussion about a student or student behaviors, that is not your own student, is not appropriate. These discussions can take place with your student's teacher or the school office if there are any questions or concerns.
- Do not share confidential information about staff or families.
- Post private and personal information
- NEVER give out or transmit personal information of students or parents.
- Use social media in a way that could be personally or physically harmful.
- Engage in cyberbullying, harassment, or disrespectful conduct toward others – staff, students, or the school community.
- Use language online that would be unacceptable in your child's classroom.

If you make a mistake...

- Please be responsible to acknowledge any mistake or misstep made online.
- Apologize to all who may have been impacted by your actions.

Netiquette

- Always use the Internet and online sites in a courteous and respectful manner.

- Recognize that among the valuable content online there is unverified, incorrect, or inappropriate content.
- Users should not post malicious or fictitious comments about any member of the school community or the school itself.
- If necessary, please inform school leadership of any issue involving the sharing of confidential information.

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying and harassing of any kind will not be tolerated. Don't be mean. Don't send emails or post comments with the intent of scaring, hurting, or intimidating someone else. Engaging in these behaviors, or any online activities intended to harm (physically or emotionally) another person, will result in the posts being taken down and potential removal from the forum. In some cases, cyberbullying can be a crime. Remember that your activities are monitored and retained by others.

Social Media Photo Policy

Posting of pictures/videos of children is not allowed on the official school Facebook page and Twitter feed, except by school leadership with parental consent.

School and Classroom Basics

Arrival and Dismissal Carlines

To make the carline move smoothly and safely, we have established a few guidelines. As you approach the building, please follow the sidewalk all the way around to the backside of the building. The pre-K carline should form a single line along the sidewalk. Please have any backpacks, bags and lunches ready to go and seat belts unbuckled. Please do not get out of your car to assist your children. Staff members will assist children entering and exiting cars. If you come into the building for any reason (visiting the office, observing or volunteering, bringing your child late or picking up your child early), please park in a designated parking space, enter through the appropriate door and sign in at the office.

Arrival time for pre-K students is 8:00-8:10am. Dismissal time is 11:30am for half day pre-K students and 3:00pm for full day students. Please be sure to clearly display your carline tag at dismissal.

Attendance

Daily attendance is expected, except in the case of illness, vacation or special circumstances. A child quickly feels "out of sync" with the other children when they are not present at school on a regular basis. The sense of community which forms between the children is adversely affected when a child is repeatedly absent.

Please notify the teacher or the office of an anticipated prolonged absence. A phone call or note is necessary if your child is sick. Tuition will not be refunded for days when a student is absent.

Our program is either full or half day and is five days per week.

Tardy Policy

Arrival time for pre-K students is 8:00-8:10am. Students arriving to morning classes after

8:10am will be marked tardy. Only those students bringing a note from a doctor, dentist or orthodontist will be given an excused tardy. If your child arrives after the morning carline you will need to walk your child into the school and sign him/her in at the front desk. *Tardy students may not enter the building without an adult to sign them in.*

Custody

If there has been a divorce or legal separation, a copy of the agreement containing custody information and the signature of the judge must be on file in the School office. Without such documentation, children will be released to either parent.

Before/After Care

GMA offers extended care for families needing before/after school care for their children. Our program, *The Grove*, is managed and operated by GMA staff members. There is a fee for families participating in *The Grove*. Please reach out to Ms. Jessica (jscholl@gma.k12.in.us) for more information on *The Grove*.

Birthdays

Birthday celebrations are held for all children who choose to do so. Those students born in the summer may celebrate their birthdays just prior to the end of the school year or on their half birthday (six months from their actual birth date). Parents need to contact their child's teacher to schedule the birthday celebration. In the event of multiple birthdays in a given week, the teacher will help to coordinate the special birthday snacks amongst the participating families. Birthday snacks must be *individually packaged* healthy choices containing very low sugar (attempting 10 grams of sugar or less). Suggested items include cheese and crackers, rice Krispie treats, Go-gurt, mini muffins, trail mix, Chex Mix, Goldfish crackers. Individual teachers will notify families of allergies or food sensitivities in the classroom that may impact birthday treats. The birthday child may also bring pictures of him/herself as a baby. No balloon arrangements, gift bags or videos may be sent.

In order to avoid hurt feelings, no invitations for outside birthday parties may be passed out at school, unless the entire class is invited. No groups of children will be sent home with a birthday child and no gifts should be sent to school.

Classroom Etiquette for Parents

Parents are not permitted in the classroom during class time unless invited by the teacher. For the sake of the children, the work time and environment is to be protected. Conversations between the teacher and parents can sometimes be disruptive to a class and should be held either at another location or at another time.

Parents who do come into the classrooms should do so quietly. Please remember the following rules of etiquette:

- Come into the classroom as quietly as possible.
- Be as unobtrusive as possible to help maintain the integrity of the class that is in progress.

Please do not make an attempt to converse with your child's teacher before class starts in the morning. The teacher needs every moment to attend to the environment and the students, so that class will begin smoothly and on time. Each teacher has an established email account with the school. Parents are encouraged to utilize email for non-urgent communications with their student's teacher. Please allow two school days' time for a

response from teachers and school staff.

Dress Code and Clothing Suggestions

As a school community, we promote proper dress and personal hygiene. Appropriate clothing which respects the dignity of the person is required. Students should dress with modesty and neatness. It is the direct responsibility of the parent/guardian to make sure all students are dressed to help maintain a quality educational environment.

Students should come to school dressed in clothes that will not distract from the learning experience. They should be comfortable and allow for easy movement.

Pre-K students spend time polishing, painting, preparing food and creating art projects. Please know your child's clothes may come home dirty from these works. An extra set of clothing should be labeled and sent to school in a large zipper-lock bag, labeled with the child's name. Please note: the bag and all clothing need to be labeled with the child's name.

Learning to dress oneself is a major developmental task for three, four and five year olds. The feeling of independence a child gets from dressing himself helps to build self-esteem. The self confidence spreads to other areas as he tries more new things. Help your child learn to dress himself by supplying clothing that he can be successful at putting on and taking off. Such items that are easier to handle are pull-on pants instead of overalls, elastic waistbands instead of belts, dresses that do not tie, zip or button in the back. Make sure that zippers, buttons and buttonholes are easy to do. Slippers, labeled with the child's name, should be sent to school, if requested by the teacher.

- Clothing must be in good repair, free of rips and tears.
- All pants and shorts are to be worn at the waist.
- Dresses, skirts and shorts must be of appropriate length (fingertip length or longer).
- Shirts with inappropriate pictures, sayings or suggestive messages are not allowed.
- No bare backs or midriffs.
- No visible underwear.
- No flip flops. All shoes must have a back on them.

Field Trips

When possible, field trips are taken by the pre-K classes to supplement the educational program and to familiarize the children and their families with the resources of their immediate community. Students must have a signed permission slip in order to participate in field trips. Parents will be notified by the teacher prior to each trip. All field trips are considered to be educational and are still counted as part of the educational day for the school. Therefore, GMA cannot allow siblings who are not students at GMA to attend these functions. Siblings who are currently attending GMA but are in a separate educational level will not be allowed to attend field trips unless their class is also scheduled for the same field trip. Should a child's parents/guardian decide to not send their child on the field trip, then the child will not attend school that day as all pre-K staff will be needed to chaperone the field trip.

Emergency Preparedness Drills

Regularly scheduled (monthly) fire and storm drills are held in accordance with the

guidelines set by the Indiana State Fire Marshall. In the event of an actual fire or storm emergency, no student will be allowed to leave the building with a parent/guardian until the threat has passed. Additionally, we are required to practice lockdown drills with students and staff.

Illness Guidelines

Our pre-K program will adhere to all GMA school policies regarding student illness. Please refer to the GMA Family Handbook for specific information regarding health and safety measures including the administration of medication at school.

Lunch and Snacks

Parents should notify the teacher and office of any food sensitivities or allergies.

Children who stay all day need to bring a sack lunch each day. Please include any plastic silverware needed. There is a limited amount of time available for heating lunches, due to the number of students eating lunch at school. Please pack items that do not require heating.

Guidelines for lunch/snacks:

- Parents should pack nutritionally sound lunches for their children.
- Leftovers will be placed back into either the original container or a baggie to take home to show parents what was not eaten.
- Parents should try to heat food at home and pack in insulated containers whenever possible.
- Difficult to open containers should be opened at home and repackaged into containers the child can open himself, in order to foster independence.
- Candy, soda, and gum are not permitted.

Outdoor Play

Children love to be outdoors and enjoy outdoor activity whenever possible. Your child should come to school dressed according to the outdoor weather conditions. Sharp changes in temperature occur in fall and spring. Temperatures may be cool and the ground may be damp early in the day. In the winter we will not go outside if either temperature or wind chill is below 20 degrees. If you feel your child is too sick to go outside, then your child is too sick to be at school.

Inclement Weather Delays and Closures

In the case of inclement weather, please stay tuned to local TV or radio stations to be aware of a possible two hour delay or school closing. You will need to watch/listen for Geist Montessori Academy. Families will be notified via our mass communication system and information will be posted on the GMA Facebook page. If Geist Montessori Academy has a two hour delay or is closed, the Geist Montessori Academy pre-K will be delayed or closed as well. There will be no half-day pre-K on days that are on a delayed start schedule.

School Property

Students are expected to respect all school property. Parents will be notified if damages are caused by their child. The cost of repairs will be billed to the parents and the child may be suspended.