**Waycross Discovery Montessori School**

**Parent Handbook**

**2023-2024**

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**Waycross Discovery Montessori School does not discriminate on the basis of ethnicity, race, color, religion, sex or disability. We endeavor to respect and protect the rights and diversity of individuals we serve.**

discoverymontessorischool.us

dmsofwayx@gmail.com

711 Satilla Boulevard

Waycross, Georgia 31501

**“Whoever touches the life of the child touches the most sensitive point of a whole, which has roots in the most distant past and climbs toward the infinite future”**

Dr. Maria Montessori

**Montessori Philosophy**

Aided by world-renowned doctor and educator Maria Montessori, the Montessori Philosophy naturally blossomed under her guidance. The Montessori Philosophy is not a step-by-step, foolproof educational curriculum devised through vigorous pedagogical training and intellectual contemplation. Rather, the method evolved naturally and without intention based on Maria Montessori’s observations of mixed-age children in an optimal environment, the first Children’s House.

In this environment, the ideal conditions were created which helped to bring about the development of the child. It encouraged the children to be their own creators, working actively on their environment to create infinite experiences. By observing their experiences, Maria Montessori came to understand the needs (sensitive periods) of each child at their particular stage of development. Because of her observations, Maria Montessori provided material, which helped to stimulate the children and expand their experiences, thus developing the Montessori method we use today.

“The child has a deep love and need for purposeful work. He works, however, not as an adult for completion of a job, but the sake of an activity itself. It is this activity which enables him to accomplish his most important goal: the development of himself – his mental, physical, and psychological powers.”

Dr. Maria Montessori

**Waycross DISCOVERY MONTESSORI SCHOOL’S**

**Mission Statement**

To encourage the development of the whole child by providing a comprehensive Montessori education, cultivating independent thought and foundational skills as well as awareness of their environment; empathy for others; social ease and confidence.

To establish within a child the intellectual, emotional, and physical rigor needed to become a self-directed learner, flexible thinker, creative problem solver, and support their ever-increasing curiosity about the world in which they live.

To help our students to grow up to be successful global citizens.

**School Philosophy**

Every child is one-of-a-kind. It is our responsibility as Montessori educators to respect the needs and encourage the independent growth of each student by creating a learning environment that does the same. While well-structured and clearly defined, our methodologies are free to adapt to the individual development levels, interests and strengths of each student.

We firmly believe that the best way for a child to thrive is to empower that child by creating an environment filled with exciting possibilities to learn through all five senses.

**School Organization**

**Children served:**  Toddler Class: ages 18 months- 3 years old - Primary Class: ages 3 years old (potty trained) to age 6 years old.

**Months Of Operation**: August thru May

**Days of Operation:** Monday thru Friday

**Hours/Time of Operation:** 7:30am – 3pm

**Governing Structure**

Waycross Discovery Montessori School is a non-profit organization. WDMS is governed by the Waycross Discovery Montessori Board of Trustees. Its’ income is derived from tuition and fundraising.

**Board of Trustees:**

Doris Germano- President

Dannette Kallay

Cathy Cornelius

**Administrative Staff**

Head of School/Executive Director – Carly Durden

**Teaching Staff**

**Primary Program**

Directress – Carly Durden

Assistant Directress- Renee Leedom

**Toddler Program**

Directress – Megan Oliver

Assistant Directress – Megan Urieta

**Daily Operations**

**School Hours**

**Teachers/ Head of School:**

**Arrival**

**8:00 a.m**

**Toddler Class Half Day Program:**

**Arrival Dismissal**

**9:15 a.m.-9:30 a.m. 11:45 a.m.-12 p.m.**

**Toddler Class Full Day Program:**

**Arrival Dismissal**

**9:15 a.m. -9:30 a.m. 2:30 p.m. -2:45 p.m.**

**Primary Class Half Day Program:**

**Arrival Dismissal**

**8:45 a.m.-9 a.m. 11:45 a.m.-12 p.m.**

**Primary Class Full Day Progra,:**

**Arrival Dismissal**

**8:45 a.m.-9a.m. 2:45 p.m.-3 p.m.**

Waycross Discovery Montessori School serves ages 18 months-6 years old.

**Waycross Discovery Montessori School 2023-2024 Calendar**

Teacher Planning Days August 2-August 9, 2023

Back to School Night 5:30pm / PARENT ONLY EVENT August 8, 2023

Open House 10am-12pm August 9,2023

K/LE begin                                                        August 10, 2023

3 year olds begin (Primary)                                                            August 11, 2023

Toddlers begin TBA

4 year old’s begin August 14, 2023

Labor Day Holiday September 4, 2023

Professional Learning Day                                                        September 22, 2023

Fall Break                                                                  October 16-20, 2023

Thanksgiving Holidays                                                           November 20-24, 2023

Parent/Teacher Conferences December 14 & 15, 2023 (No school for Students)

Winter Holidays                                                                  December 18, 2023-January 1, 2024

Teacher Planning Day   January 2 , 2024

Students’ First Day Back January 3,2024

Martin Luther King Holiday-No School                                     January 15, 2024

President’s Day -No School February 19, 2024

Teacher Planning Day                                                      March 29, 2024

Spring Break                                                                         April 1-5, 2024

Last Day of School for Students /NOON dismissal May 22, 2024

Parent /Teacher Conference Days/NO SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS   May 23 & 24, 2024

**Morning Arrival**

* Parents will be informed of drop off and pick up procedures at Back to School Night.
* Drop-off time is at 8:45 to 9:00. PLEASE Understand that arriving after 9:00 is a HUGE disruption for the classroom.
* Any student arriving after the 9am will be considered tardy. THIS WILL BE STRICTLY ENFORCED to keep in line with the Ga. state guidelines for COVID-19. If there are reasons, such as a doctor’s appointment, then parent may send a note through Procare. If parents arrive after 9am the following step with be enforced :

**First Late Arrival** :A verbal reprimand by the Head of School (HOS) reminding parents of the importance of arriving on time.

**Second Late Arrival**: A conference with HOS to remind parents of the importance of this rule and to help devise a plan to be punctual.

**Third late Arrival**: Parent will be fined $20 for each infraction.

**Tardy Policy**

* All students should arrive prior to the class start time and be ready to start work when class begins. Punctuality to school IS ESSENTIAL IN PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR A SUCCESSFUL DAY. When a child is tardy, they have missed important structure and routines that help their day to run smoothly. If a child will be late, the parent should notify the teacher by message on Procare. *In order to prevent interruptions after instruction starts, parents should make every effort to have their child arrive on time.*
* Late departure is when a parent is unable to pick up the child at 2:45 -3pm. If prior arrangements are not made, a $25 fee will be assessed, payable upon pickup. In addition, should the child remain for more than 10 minutes, a charge of $15.00 will be due for every 5 minutes that the child remains at school. After 3pm is teacher planning. Please be respectful of the time it takes your teacher to prepare for her students.

**Dismissal**

* Georgia State Law mandates the names of all persons with whom a child may leave must be on file at the school. Each time a child’s normal pickup schedule is changed, a message must be submitted on Procare at least 30 minutes prior departure.
* Faculty members cannot transport students to or from school unless a release of responsibility and liability is signed by a parent and is filed with the **Head of School**.
* WDMS will require **picture identification** of anyone whom a parent has given permission to pick up a child if he or she is not familiar to our staff.

**EMEREGENCY CONTACT AND RELEASE PERSONS**

* PLEASE UPDATE INFORMATION ON PROCARE!! Please list the persons you would like contacted (in order of priority) if you cannot be reached in case of emergency. Check the “Emergency Contact and Release” box, as the persons listed will also be authorized to pick-up or accompany the child for the purposes of medical treatment. Additionally, please list the persons you would like to be authorized for pick-up only on a given day (i.e. babysitter). For these persons, check the “Release Only” box. For the safety of your child, we will request all authorized release persons with whom staff members are not familiar to provide Government-issued photo identification at the time of pick-up. You may also be required to complete state-specific emergency release forms required by individual state learning centers licensing regulations. Please keep this information up-to-date. **EMERCENCY CONTACT AND RELEASE PERSONS** form is located in the **Enrollment Agreement.**

**Attendance**

* Daily attendance and punctuality is the responsibility of the parents and the student. Proper attendance assures the greatest potential for learning opportunities for your child.
* In the event that your child is absent, please send a message on Procare. **A written note explaining each absence must be submitted upon return to school.**

**Illnesses**

1. **Students who have a contagious disease should be kept at home.**
2. A student that has been exposed or tested positive for COVID-19 will not be allowed to enter the school.

A student who has/had a fever and another contagious symptom, such as, but not limited to, a rash, diarrhea, sore throat or has vomited within the previous **24 hours**, or has a cold or cough should also be kept out of school. It's a **fever** when a **child's** temperature is at or above one of these levels: measured orally (in the mouth): 100°F (37.8°C) measured rectally (in the bottom): 100.4°F (38°C) measured in an axillary position (under the arm): 99°F (37.2°C)

If your child has/had COVID-19 he/she may return to school after treatment has rendered the condition no longer contagious, but no less than 14 days with a doctor’s approval. If your child has conjunctivitis (pink eye), or Strep he/she may return to school 48 hours after medical treatment has begun with a doctor’s approval. If your child has an infestation of lice he/she may return to school after ALL nits/eggs have been removed and a written note by a physician stating NO lice or eggs are present on your child. Parents must provide a written note from a physician. Parents should notify the school to report a health-related absence via Procare. Please be considerate of other students and staff.

When a student becomes ill during school hours, parents or the emergency contact person will be called to take the child home as soon as possible. Prior to that time, the child will be isolated and kept under adult supervision.

3. If it is necessary for medication to be given during school hours, parents must fill out the appropriate form and send the form and medication, in the original pharmacy-labeled container, to the Head of School. **Only the Head of School is able to dispense medication to students**. Forms are available in the main lobby. Please note on the Medication Authorization Form, the section that states: If noticeable adverse reaction to medication what action was taken? Describe. Please make sure this section is filled out in detail.

4. To be excused from participating in Physical Education activities, parents must provide a written request. However, any time a child has to be excused from Physical Education for frequent or prolonged period of time, the parent must provide a written note from a physician.

5. If your child/children have been exposed to a communicable disease you will be notified by head of school, or your teacher.

6. If you state on any of the WDMS paperwork that your child(ren) is allergic to something such as a food or environmental **Bright From the Start (childcare state licensing authority) requires you must fill out a “Plan of Action” form with the head of School and signed by your child’s doctor before your child will be able to attend WDMS.**

**Classroom Procedures**

The following list describes the structure of the classroom and how the children are expected to work within the environment. By using these guidelines in the home, not only will you reinforce WDMS procedures, but your child will feel a sense of structure and security in his/her life as well.

* Walk when inside the classroom.
* Speak in a quiet tone of voice.
* Carry one thing at a time, using both hands.
* Put work away when finished.
* Roll up work-rug slowly and tightly, keeping the ends even, and put it away.
* Push chairs in when leaving tables.
* In circle, keep legs crossed and hands to self.
* Raise hand to talk.
* Walk around the work rugs.
* Respect other students’ work.
* Clean up whatever is spilled or dropped.
* When the bell rings, stop, look and listen.

Restroom Procedure

The following describes how the children are expected to utilize the bathroom facilities.

* Flush the commode after each use.
* Wash hands with soap and water for 20 seconds.
* Put paper towels in the touchless trashcan.

**Playground Procedures**

Our staff adheres to the following guidelines to ensure consistency for the child and his/her knowledge of what is allowed when using the playgrounds.

* Walk to and from the playground on the sidewalk.
* Go ONLY up the steps and DOWN the slide.
* Climb using two hands.
* Toys are left on the ground.
* Respect others who are climbing.
* Swing keeping the chains straight and sit forward in the seat.
* Stay on the swing until it stops, then get off.
* Stay clear of people while they are swinging.
* Throw balls to people on the ground and only when they are aware the ball is coming.
* Stay away from the fence.
* Play gently with others.
* Keep the sandbox toys in the sandbox or in the storage container, and return equipment to its proper place.
* Keep portable toys off stationary toys.
* Hazardous natural objects (such as sticks and limbs) on the playground should be cleared to outside the gate.
* Sand must remain on the ground.
* A child must be capable of mastering the equipment without adult assistance before it is safe for him/her to use the equipment.
* Sit on the seat of the picnic tables.
* Protect the flowers and the gardens.
* Ask permission to leave the playground.
* **\*Please note that due to liabilities, the playground can only be used if a WDMS staff member is present.**

**Alternate Nutrition Plan**

To comply with Georgia State Laws, parents must comply with:

**CRITERIA FOR SACK LUNCHES**

1. Nutritional requirements as presently listed in 591-1-1-.15 of the Bright from the Start Rules for Child Care Learning Centers must be met.

2**. The center shall have a written agreement with parents as to the parent’s responsibility to provide the child a nutritious sack lunch.**

3. The center shall provide all parents written nutritional information concerning the content of sack lunches.

4. Food brought into the center shall be evaluated each day and if the child’s lunch does not meet the nutritional requirements of 591-1-1-.15(1) the center must provide the child the additional food necessary to meet the requirements and the parent will be asked to cover the cost of the supplement.

5. Individual lunches shall be **labeled** and children monitored to assure that there is no swapping of home-prepared food.

6. The center shall provide for proper storage and refrigeration of sack lunches; all perishable and potentially hazardous foods shall be refrigerated at a temperature of 40 degrees or below. [591-1-1-.15(10)]

“Potentially hazardous food” means any perishable food, which consists in whole or in part of milk or milk products, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish or other ingredients capable of supporting rapid and progressive growth of infectious microorganisms.

7. If there is any food preparation done in the center, all related requirements in 591-1-1-.15 of the Bright from the Start Rules for Child Care Learning Centers must be met.

8. Each child shall be served at least 4 ounces of milk each day if not contraindicated by special diets. [591-1-1-.15(1)]

* Please note: WDMS promotes, models and teaches a healthy life style to our students. Our children learn by behaviors, attitudes, and actions of their caregivers. Please be sensitive to this matter as you prepare your child’s snacks and meals. **Unhealthy, processed, sugary foods and drinks are discouraged at WDMS.**
* On a weekly basis parents may be asked to provide snacks, consisting of a variety of whole, nutritious foods, for the whole class.
* Directresses will plan the schedule and inform parents of their scheduled time. Otherwise, parents will provide a snack for their own children.
* P**lease advise, in writing, of any food allergies and/or diet restrictions your child may have. Must fill out BFTS state paperwork.**
* Children in the full-day program should bring their lunches in bags or lunch boxes labeled with their names. Lunches should consist of a protein, fresh fruit and a vegetable. Sandwiches can be meat, cheese, egg, etc. Other items may be included at the parent’s discretion with the exception of candy, frosted desserts and gum. The children will be encouraged to eat the nutritious foods first. Water or milk should also be included. **Please do not include any kind of soda.**
* At the end of the lunch period the children are directed to rewrap any substantial amount of uneaten food. This will help you determine the quantities to send for your child/children and also their likes and dislikes of food packed for them. Allowing your child/children to help choose and prepare his/her lunch not only builds independence, but also encourages them to eat the healthy foods he/she has chosen.
* **Recent studies have shown that certain food additives and excess sugar affect the behavior of the children. Please take this into consideration when packing lunches.**

**Waycross Discovery Montessori School Attire**

Uniform Policy

WDMS believes that wearing uniforms is beneficial for the student for the following reasons:

* Facilitates security by identifying outsiders
* Places emphasis on learning, not clothing
* Helps academic success
* Reduces peer pressure and social stigmas
* Encourages distinction of character and personality, instead of appearance
* Allows for cohesive presentation as a group
* Enhances school spirit
* Lowers long-term clothing costs

Please adhere to the following regarding WDMS Uniform Policy.

* Uniforms will be required Monday through Friday.
* Uniforms should consist of the following:
* Waycross Discovery Montessori School T-shirt must be worn each school day.
* Pants can be cotton, cotton blend or corduroy. Pants can have an elastic waist.
* *Shorts* – shorts can be cotton, cotton blend or corduroy and can have an elastic waist.
* Shoes/Sneakers must fit securely on the foot. Light up shoes are not appropriate.

**Dress Code**

Even though WDMS has a Uniform Policy. Independence is an important Montessori principle, and therefore, clothing should not only be comfortable, but also be easy enough so the child may dress him/herself. Please choose clothes that are sized to be comfortable.

* *Shoes must have backs and soft-soles* and be suitable for running and climbing i.e. sneakers. *Cowboy boots or flip-flops are not permitted*. Crocs can only be worn inside the classroom; the child must bring a change of shoes for outdoor time.
* *Indoor shoes* are to be worn inside the building. This assists with the indoor/outdoor transitions, helping children to appreciate the different behavior in both settings. It keeps the environment free from mud and dirt; this is essential since the children often work on the floors. Indoor shoes also keep the room quieter for the work environment.
* **Label** your child’s backpack and clothing, particularly coats, gloves, umbrellas, indoor shoes/slippers etc.
* **Please provide a complete extra set of clothes in a Ziploc bag, labeled with your child’s name, to be used in case of accidents.**

**Implementation**

The school will strive to achieve full compliance through the use of positive reinforcement measures, and will resort to disciplinary action only when positive measures and supports fail to assure compliance.

No student will be considered non-compliant with the uniform policy in the following instances:

1. When the student wears the dress of a nationally recognized youth organization or activity, such as boys/girls scouts.

2. When the student’s parent or guardian has secured exemption from the school policy for religious or health considerations.

3. When a student is on school grounds outside of normal school hours, appropriate attire is required.

4. When a field trip or school event may require specialized clothing, appropriate attire is required.

**Non- Compliance:**

First Occurrence: A call will be made to the parent/guardian to bring in clothes

A letter will be sent home reinforcing the uniform policy.

Second Occurrence: A call home to have the parent to bring in clothes and remind them that the student must adhere to the school uniform policy.

Third Occurrence: Parent is notified to pick child up from school.

T-Shirts may be purchased for $10 upon request.

**Birthdays**

* In the Montessori classroom, every child's birthday may be celebrated in a special way. We call it "The Walk Around the Sun." To celebrate the children's years on Earth, each the child carries a globe (which is one of our works) as they walk around the sun (a candle). The child walks around the sun one time for each year of life. We talk about how the Earth goes around the sun and every time it goes around once that that is the same as one year or 365 days. The months are laid around the sun. The child then starts and stops at their birthday month. If a child is turning 4 they will make 4 rotations around the sun. This celebration is great for learning the months, the concept of the Earth revolving around the sun, the concept that we live on Earth, and it's great for counting! Teachers may ask parents to provide a photograph for each year of their child’s life, along with a description of any special event that occurred during that year (a trip, a new sibling).
* Parents who wish to provide a special snack should make arrangements with the Directress at least one **week** in advance. Please ask your Directress for a list of appropriate celebration foods. The celebration could take place before lunch so the servings should be small. Please, **no cookies, candies, frosted cake or cupcakes**.
* Children’s birthdays can be a source of joy and pain. Parents should only bring invitations for the Directress to hand out or put in other children’s backpacks when **ALL** of the children are invited. If only a few select children are desired, parents are asked to handle their child’s party invitations by mailing them from home or with a phone call. Please help your child develop an awareness and sensitivity for the feelings of others by being discreet about party plans.
* Join our School Library Birthday Club and commemorate the day by purchasing their favorite book for the library. The books you purchase will be dedicated in your child’s name. Bookplates are inscribed with your child’s name to honor the special gift. Please check with the HOS for details.

**Holiday Observances**

The Directress structures all holiday observances. Assistance from parent helpers is always appreciated. Each classroom will have a sign up sheet for help with tasks and supplies. Observed holidays include, but are not limited to: Maria Montessori’s Birthday, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukah, Martin Luther King Day, President’s Day, Valentine’s Day, Earth Day and Memorial Day.

**Sharing Time**

Children often wish to share special things and bring various items to school. Items of educational interest are welcome i.e. flowers, musical instruments, objects and dolls from foreign countries, things from nature, postcards, and photos. A note of explanation enables the Directress to help the child in the presentation. Toys, treasures, money, play jewelry, etc. are to be left at home. Children are not permitted to play with them at school, as they are easily lost.

**Field Trips / Transportation**

**NOTE: Routine Transportation will not be provided at this program.**

On occasion, WDMS will sponsor and conduct field trips for the educational enrichment of the students. Participation in field trips is a privilege. No student may participate in a field trip unless a signed parent/guardian permission slip (provided by the school) for the specific event is submitted to the School. Some field trips require a fee. Teachers have extensive directions regarding field trip procedures.

In order to drive on field trips, parents are required to have on file:

(1) The notarized “Affidavit of Good Moral Character” form

(2) The Volunteer Affidavit

(3) Volunteer Emergency Information sheet

(4) A copy of a current driver’s license, and

(5) A copy of proof of current insurance.

(6) Bright From The Start accepted fingerprints. ($51.00 fee)

**Transportation Policy**

Because of the heavy auto traffic during arrival and departure times, children are not allowed to be in the parking area. Each parent or legal guardian is responsible for their child’s observance of this policy until the child enters the school building escorted by the parent.

Georgia State Law mandates that the names of all persons with whom a child may leave must be on file at the school. Each time a child’s normal pickup schedule is changed, and/or the child is being picked up by someone other than a parent or legal guardian, **a written permission slip must be submitted**. Permission slips are in the main entrance. Telephone notifications will be accepted on an emergency basis only.

Transportation Release: Faculty members cannot transport students to or from school unless a Release of Responsibility and Liability is signed by a parent and filed with the Head of School.

Car Seats: All passengers in all vehicles are required by law to be buckled in. Children through the age of 5 must be secured in a separate, federally approved child seat installed by parents.

**Student Discipline/Behavioral Policy**

The development of inner discipline in a child is a continuous goal at Waycross Discovery Montessori School. Within the Montessori environment, the individual rights of the child and adult are highly respected. Should this respect not be shown, the following procedures will be implemented:

1. The incident is reviewed discreetly between the child/children involved and the faculty member present.

2. The child/children may be removed to a designated area, but kept within the program environment.

3. If the severity of an incident or the incident is repeated, the child is removed from the program environment to calm down under the guidance of a staff member. The parent is notified of this occurrence.

4. At the request of the Head of School, faculty member or parent, a conference is scheduled.

5. Following such conference, a mutually agreed upon behavioral plan will be designed to best meet the needs of the child/children and the others within the program environment.

6. If the behavioral plan is not successful, professional consultation may be recommended.

7. Refusal on the part of the parent to follow the behavioral plan will result in dismissal of the child from the school.

8. At no time will corporal punishment be used.

9. All personnel must comply with the Waycross Discovery Montessori School’s written disciplinary practices. Such policies shall include standards that prohibit children from being subjected to discipline which is severe, humiliating, frightening or associated with food, rest or toileting.

If the result of the assessment combined with observation of the student’s behavior indicates a need for further evaluation, the Directress may recommend educational and/or psychological testing.

**Anti-Bullying Policy**

Waycross Discovery Montessori School is committed to providing an educational setting that is safe, secure and free from harassment and bullying for all of its students and employees. This includes students bullying students, adults bullying students, adults bullying adults and students bullying adults.

DMS will not tolerate bullying and harassment of any type. Conduct that constitutes bullying and harassment, as defined herein, is prohibited:

* during any academic day or activity conducted by the school
* during any school-related or school sponsored program or activity
* through the use of data or computer software that is accessed through a computer system, or computer network of the school.

*“Bullying”* means systematically and chronically inflicting physical hurt or psychological distress on one or more students or employees. It is defined as any unwanted and repeated written, verbal, or physical behavior, including any threatening, insulting or dehumanizing gesture, by an adult or student, that is severe or pervasive enough to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment; cause discomfort or humiliation; or unreasonably interfere with the individual’s school performance or participation; and may involve but not limited to:

* teasing
* social exclusion
* threat
* intimidation
* stalking
* physical violence
* theft
* public humiliation
* destruction of property

Bullying is *not* routine misbehavior during which children are “playing” with each other. It’s intentional, unwanted, and repeated action.

*“Cyber Bullying”* means electronically transmitted acts (i.e., internet, e-mail, cellular telephone, personal digital assistance or wireless hand-held device) that a student, adult or a group of students or adults exhibits toward another particular student(s) and /or adults, the behavior both causes mental and or physical harm to the other student/adult and is sufficiently severe, persistent, or pervasive that it creates an intimidating, threatening, or abusive educational environment for the other student(s) or adult (s).

*“Cyber Stalking”* means to engage repetitively in an unwanted course of conduct to communicate or to cause to be communicated, words, images, or language by or through the use of electronic mail or electronic communication, directed at a specific person, causing substantial emotional distress to that person and serving no legitimate purpose.

*Signs a Child is being Bullied*

* Personal belongings are missing, damaged or scattered
* Unexplained bruises or wounds
* Exclusion or isolation from peers; lack of friends
* Not wanting to go to school
* Appearing to be depressed, unhappy, distressed, anxious, withdrawn, or insecure
* Loss of interest or inability to focus on schoolwork

*Strategies for Students:*

Students need a variety of appropriate actions to take if they experience or observe bullying:

* Seek immediate help from an adult.
* Speak up or offer support to the victim.
* Privately support or offer words of kindness to those being hurt.
* Express disapproval of bullying by not joining in on the laughter, teasing, or spreading of rumors or gossip.
* Attempt to defuse problem situations by taking the bully aside and asking him/her to “cool it.”

*If your Child is the Bully*

Parents are the best resources to help their children stop bullying and have better relationships with their classmates.

*Signs a child may be a bully:*

* Lacks empathy and doesn’t sympathize with others
* Values aggression
* Likes to be in charge
* Is an arrogant winner and a sore loser
* Often fights with brothers and sisters
* Is impulsive

*To reduce harm to students/adults and to protect WDMS from liability, the following policy will be implemented:*

* We will explain, reinforce, and uphold the standards of behavior we expect of students and adults.
* We will take all reports seriously and investigate all complaints promptly and thoroughly according to a standard procedure.
* We will ensure confidentiality.
* We will provide interventions appropriate for the level of seriousness of infractions.
* We will protect witnesses and victims from retaliation.
* We will implement appropriate consequences if allegations are substantiated.
* We will promptly report suspected child abuse, sexual assault, or other criminal acts.
* DMS will not tolerate any type of bullying or harassment.
* With each situation, we will take into consideration the age, and the developmental level of the child.

*If a person suspects bullying, the HOS should be notified and further action will take place.*

**Communications**

**School Home**

1. Procare

**It is essential that you keep all Procare information updated.**

All newsletters, and other notices are sent home through Procare. Communications via Procare are sent on an as needed basis. It is essential that parents/guardians be attentive to each of these communications as many questions are answered within these communications regarding the life of the school and necessary requirements for your child. Should paperwork be necessary, it will be sent home in the backpack or handed to you personally at drop-off / pick-up by a staff person.

*2. Calendar*

The annual calendar will be posted and copies will be made available to families. Reminders of upcoming events will be sent as timely as possible. Please note that some dates and activities may change, however, parents will be notified ahead of time of any significant changes. WDMS follows Ware County Board of Education calendar. Some changes will be made to accommodate for Parent/Teacher Conferences.

*3. Website*

All current information will be posted on the website and can be viewed at www.discoverymontessorischool.us

*4. Facebook*

We encourage all parents, staff, alumni and supporters of WDMS to join our Facebook group.

**Parent /Teacher**

School is an extension of the child’s home environment. Therefore, we feel it is most important for the parent and Directress to communicate with each other. Parents generally want to know what their children are doing during the hours spent away from home. Directresses need to know what factors are influencing the children. Any changes, whether positive or negative, can influence your child’s behavior. Grandparents visiting, the death of a pet, illness, divorce or separation, moving, etc., all contribute to changes in your child’s daily routine. Please make your child’s Directress aware of these changes so he/she can better meet the needs of your child.

While WDMS encourages an open line of communication for the parents, we also ask that you respect the students learning environment of the person with whom you are communicating. There are appropriate times and methods in which to communicate.

We ask that you refrain from texting or calling your child’s teacher on their cell phone during the school day. You are welcome to leave a message for your child’s teacher in the main office. We will gladly relay the message and you should be contacted by the end of the day. If you are contacting your child’s teacher by e-mail, please realize that it will be necessary that she email you back at the end of the school day.

To continuously offer the best education for your child, we must protect the instructional time and environment from interruptions. We appreciate your understanding and help in this matter.

**Conferences**

* Parent-teacher conferences are an integral part of Montessori philosophy. The importance of communication is necessary for both parents and the staff at WDMS. Conferences will be held at least two times a year or more frequently if necessary. Parents are encouraged to request a Directress conference should a need arise.
* These conferences allow parents to get to know the teacher, understand the academic curriculum and learn about the progress their child is making in the Montessori classroom. Appointments are made through the child’s Directress or assistant. Keeping the lines of communication open with your child’s Directress is an important part of the Montessori experience.
* Observations by the teacher and the parent are a key tool to assess student progress. Parents are welcome to schedule an opportunity to observe their child prior to the conference.

**Parental Rights & Responsibilities**

**Parental Responsibilities**

***Parent Involvement Team***

Our Parent Involvement Team holds various roles in our school community. The major function of this team is to create a connection between the school and parents. This committee assists in organizing many school-wide activities, such as: timely communications between school and parents, acquiring volunteers for events for the school, seeking information to be included in our parent resource library, and providing the link for all stakeholders – staff, parents, students, community and alumni. *It is all parents’ responsibility to respond as much as possible to this team when requested;* it is evident that many hands make light work of a heavy load. If you are interested in serving on this group’s Leadership Team, please let the HOS know.

***Required Educational Programs***

In order for parents to continue to develop understanding of the Montessori education, and as stated in each student’s contract, (“Within the child's first year at WDMS it is mandatory that all parents attend at least four (4) hours of parent education meetings, and two (2) hours every year thereafter.”) there is the requirement for fulfill the hours for parent education. These hours are beyond the volunteer hours; however, may be logged in the volunteer log for documentation. There is a parent resource library which allows parents to check out books to read and self-educate; however, please feel free to ask questions of your teachers. There will also be opportunities for attendance at educational occasions, (such as Open House, Orientation, Transition Meetings, and Showcases,) held at the school for everyone’s participation. If parents need assistance or resources, please speak to your child’s teacher or the HOS.

**Volunteer Obligations**

There will be many opportunities for each family to fulfill their required volunteer hours. Volunteer Work Parties are one method. They become wonderful social events hosted by our Parent Involvement Team while necessary maintenance and repairs to our school take place.

Each family is required to fill 20 volunteer hours at various projects during the school year. At least ten hours must be given to school-wide projects. The remaining ten hours *may* be given in the classroom; however, if parents are unavailable during school hours to give time to the classroom, more hours may be given to school-wide projects. Each family will receive a questionnaire to indicate area(s) in which they would like to volunteer. Hours will be awarded for the classroom for tasks that are outlined on the questionnaire. Should there be an area of interest not covered, these hours must be preapproved by the HOS.

Volunteer hours are “contracted” to be met. In the event that volunteer hours are not met by May 1, planned arrangements must be made to meet this requirement. If the 20 hour volunteer obligation is not met by May 1st, a $20.00 fee per hour not completed will be assessed to the student's account. When you volunteer, it is very important to either record your time on the volunteer sheet located in the front office or on a volunteer sheet in your child’s classroom. This is how your hours are tracked for completion for your volunteer time.

***Court Orders***

If there is a court order specifying the rights and responsibilities of individual parents, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the School with an official copy of the court order. The custodial parent should submit to the Head of School the "Custody Section" of the divorce decree if it contains information which may be useful to the School in fulfilling its obligations.

***Buckley Amendment***

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, Ch. 1002, FS.

Our School abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order to the contrary, WDMS will provide the non-custodial parent with access to the academic records and to other school-related information regarding the child. If there is a court order specifying that there is to be no information given to the non-custodial parent, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the school with an official copy of the court order.

It is essential to communicate the same information to both parents at the same time. Therefore, if possible, joint conferences will be held. If either parent is uncomfortable with scheduling joint conferences, he or she should contact the HOS to discuss the situation.

***Cell Phone Usage***

If you need to speak to a teacher, please call the school and your message will be delivered to the teacher. Please *do not* call or text your child’s teacher during class time. Teachers attention to children must not be interrupted.

Also, please be respectful and leave your cell phone in the car or turn it off completely (not just silenced) so that children’s learning is not interrupted. Your child deserves your full attention while you are in his/her class.

***Expectations*** *– What WDMS can expect from you as a parent*

* Attendance at meetings, orientations and parent/teacher conferences.
* Acceptance of the Montessori philosophy and adherence to the guidelines of the Parent Handbook.
* Communication concerning situations that may affect your child’s school performance.
* Early communication to the Directress or Head of School about problems or concerns.
* Involvement in parent volunteer activities and other projects to support the school.
* Prompt response to tuition and paperwork obligations.
* A positive attitude towards the school and philosophy you have chosen for your child.

***Respect***

*We expect that all persons involved at WDMS (to include employees, parents/family members, students, and volunteers) will treat each other with dignity and respect.* Harassment will not be tolerated. Harassment is defined as unwelcome conduct, whether verbal, physical, sexual, or visual, that is based on a person’s race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, or disability. If an allegation of harassment arises, the Head of School will promptly conduct a discreet investigation. If an investigation reveals that harassment has occurred, WDMS will take corrective action. At all times, WDMS reserves the right to refuse to serve parents whose behavior constitutes a hostile environment for WDMS employees.

**Parental Rights**

***Classroom Observation***

There are guidelines to the observation process. These guidelines are available upon request from the Directress. Upon arrival to the school, the parent should check in at the front office and be escorted to the observation windows.

Observations within the classroom should be scheduled with the Directress ahead of time. However, cell phones should be left in the car or turned off (not just on vibrate) as the children will be interrupted when a phone is checked in any method. WDMS knows that parents understand every child deserves the individual attention a parent can give while observing by turning the phone to the off position.

***Expectations*** *-- What you, as a parent, can expect from WDMS*

* A safe, caring and secure environment to help children develop a strong sense of character and a confident place in society.
* Faculty and staff who live by the stated philosophies of the school and Dr. Maria Montessori – the founder of the Montessori Method of education.
* Care and respect for your child as an individual who progresses at his/her own pace.
* Realistic goals for your child.
* Information about your child’s progress and advice when needed.
* Appreciation of your point of view.
* Positive thinking and professionalism.
* A prepared environment that gives your child the opportunity to cultivate curiosity and interest in an orderly and neat fashion that is easily accessible for the child.

**Emergency Procedures**

WDMS has adopted an extensive Emergency Crisis Management Plan. It may be found on-line at www.discoverymontessorischool.us under community/documents/emergency plan. Parents should make themselves familiar with this plan as it is considered an extension of this handbook and families are subjected to it as they are other policies and procedures. Please note: We observe and adhere to Ware County Board of Education storm policy. If Ware County School day(s) are cancelled, WDMS day(s) will also be cancelled. In the case of an emergency were medical treatment is needed student will be taken to:

Memorial Satilla Health Hospital

Emergency Department located at 1900 Tebeau Street, Waycross, GA, Phone: 912.283.3030.

**Administrative Procedures**

**Student Support Team**

The student support team is designed to provide support to students who may be having academic, emotional or social difficulties in the classroom. There are several steps in this process:

* Parent is notified by teacher of concerns.
* Teacher fills out the Teacher Input Form and submits to Head of School.
* Another WDMS staff member observes child and fills out the Student Observation Form.
* Head of School observes child and fills out the Student Observation Form.
* The Student Support Teams meets to discuss options and steps to be taken.
* Student Support Team and Head of School meet with parents to discuss strategies and a timeline.

Within 4 weeks of identifying concern, the student is either showing consistent improvements or failing to demonstrate positive changes. Further action will be taken if needed.

**Students with Difficulties**

In the event that a student appears to have a learning disability, learning needs or a recurring emotional, medical, behavioral, or disciplinary problem, the school will contact the child’s family to communicate concerns in a timely, sensitive and thoughtful manner. Children with mild physical, mental, or educational difficulties are considered for admission if their needs may be met within the context of the Montessori program.

Initial and/or periodic assessment by qualified professionals may be required. WDMS reserves the right to ultimately determine whether continuation in WDMS or transition to another program is in the best interest of the child and/or school classroom environment. While the school works to respond to each child’s specific needs, it may lack the expertise to develop appropriate learning strategies for children with special needs.

Please be aware that a child may be able to function in one environment during a particular phase of development and not another. This does not presume that WDMS will be able to offer the structure, assistance and supervision necessary for optimal growth of the child in the next class. If a facilitator is required for a child with special needs, the facilitator must meet all the requirements and will be under the supervision of the Directress and the Head of School, in conjunction with you the parent or guardian.

**Privacy of Student Files**

Student files are confidential records and are kept secure from unauthorized access. Each student file should contain a log (name, date, purpose) of those persons or agencies that have had access to the student’s file. Parents or guardians may have access to the child’s file by written request to the office at least 24 hours in advance. The file must be viewed in the presence of a WDMS staff member.

Officials of the State or County Health Dept. and the State Dept. of Education may have the right to review student files without the parents’ or guardians’ permission. However, with a written court order, other government officials may inspect the contents of a student’s file without the permission of the student or parent/guardian, and the school will inform the student and his family in writing that such an inspection has been requested or made.

A copy of the student’s file may be sent to an outside professional, such as a psychologist or educational diagnostician, if requested in writing by the parent(s), guardian(s), or student if he/she has attained the age of majority, with notation of pertinent papers to be sent.

**Disclosures Without Consent**

* Disclosures without consent can be made to school officials with legitimate educational interests.
* A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an educational record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.
* A school official is a person employed by WDMS as one of the following:
* an administrator, supervisor, instructor or support staff;
* a parent or student serving on an official committee, such as disciplinary or grievance committee, or assisting another school official in performing his or her professional responsibility.
* Under certain prescribed situations, disclosure can be made to state and local officers of the juvenile justice system.
* Notification of the existence of a subpoena from a federal grand jury is not required for parents and eligible students.
* If a court or other issuing agency issues a subpoena for a law enforcement purpose and orders the school not to disclose the existence or contents of the subpoena to the parent or student, the school shall not be required to notify prior to compliance with the subpoena.

**Student Records & Previous School Records**

Attendance records are retained for all children. The Department of Children and Family requires that all attendance records include the date and time of drop off and pick up of each child. WDMS retains attendance records for 3 years. Attendance records for all students are detailed and filed in the students’ permanent file.

The full cooperation of the parents is required regarding previous school records and/or test results. Test results, evaluations, report cards, etc. need to be submitted or obtained if applicable. Any professional recommendations (tutoring, therapy, etc.) must be provided to ensure the child’s success. All evaluations and professional recommendations are at the parent’s expense and must be shared with the school.

**Records/Transcripts Requests**

* All requests to access student records by parents shall be submitted to the Head of School or designee in writing.
* If a parent disagrees with any information in their children’s record and requests a change be made, the request shall be submitted in writing. The Head of School will investigate the information in question. After such investigation, if the information in the students’ record is deemed incorrect, the Head of School will make the appropriate change to the record. If the information is deemed correct, the Head of School will provide the parent a written statement explaining and justifying such decision.

**Transcripts**

* By written request, the parent/guardian or, upon attaining the age of majority, the student may ask that a photocopy of the student’s file, along with completed recommendation forms, be issued to another school. Copies sent directly are marked “Official Transcript” and are noted in the file.
* Report cards and transcripts cannot be issued if a student has an outstanding balance on his or her account that is more than sixty days past due. They will be forwarded once the account has been brought up to date.
* According to Georgia Law Health and Immunization Records will be forwarded upon request.

**Tuition Payments**

The tuition scale (including fees and discounts) may be found in the Parent Information File Box.

* Monthly statements will be issued via e-mail/ Procare or in your child’s folder; it is essential that WDMS have the correct email address on file.
* Monthly tuition payments are due on or before the 1st day of each month. Semi-annual tuition payments are due August 1st and December 1st. Annual payments are due on August 1st. Late payment is considered after the 10th of the month in all payment plans.
* All payment plans will begin August 1st and end May 1st.
* All contracts which reflect Payment Plans 2 or 3 must be accompanied by an ACH (automatic) debit form; your designated checking or savings account is automatically debited on the parent-selected 1st, 5th or 10th of each month. (Should the 1st fall on a Saturday, Sunday or a National Holiday, your account will be charged upon the next immediate open date.)
* Should parents prefer their bank account to not be accessed, payment (check or credit card) in the correct amount must be delivered, via mail or in person, to the business office prior to the access date. *Please note*: Payments made by mail or through a payment service, *must arrive* by the designated date to the school.
* Please make checks payable to Waycross Discovery Montessori School or WDMS. A $30.00 charge will be levied on all returned checks.
* A late fee of $10.00 will be charged on the 11th of each month if payment is not received. Additionally, a finance charge of 1.5% of any outstanding balance will be charged.
* If you choose to pay by credit card, we accept all major credit/debit cards (Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover) for tuition payments. You may do so via the Procare Application. Also, there will be a $35.00 charge levied for all declined cards.
* ASP contracts will be developed at the beginning of the school year and payment plans set forth at that time.

**Accounts Receivable & Collections Policy:**

This policy defines both the normal and optional procedures for the collection of funds due the school for services rendered. It does not provide for the collection of funds due from the sale of assets.

It should be understood that in all matters concerning collection and other means of debt satisfaction, the concurrence of the Head of School is required. All burden of proof of payment is upon the payee.

1. **Normal Collection Procedure**: Tuition is payable by the first of each month. A $10.00 late payment fee is charged after the 10th of each month and a 1.5% finance charge is assessed the last day of the month.

Any form of outstanding balances will be reviewed and categorized as 30-60-90 days past the due date. Each category will be handled in the following manner after the indicated time has elapsed and the amounts due have not been paid.

30-Days: Another invoice will be sent to the family with late fee.

60-Days: Invoice and a Notification of Delinquency will be mailed to the family.

90-Days: Notification of Intention to send to collections if arrangements are not made with the Head of School and Office Manager.

2. **Alternative Collection Procedure**:

Payment plan: arrangements can be made with the Head of School to set up a payment plan if the situation warrants.

3. **Non-Sufficient Funds Procedure**

For all returned checks and/or a declined credit card, a charge is levied. A certified check, money order or cash will be required within three (3) working days.

**Child Abuse Policy**

WDMS staff adheres to the child abuse policies and guidelines as written in the Georgia State Legislation. The Georgia Department of Children and Families requires that all early childhood personnel be trained to recognize and respond to suspicious situations. Suspected child abuse or neglect is reported by calling 1-800-96ABUSE.

**Smoking & Alcohol Policy**

WDMS prohibits smoking areas in the school or educational facility. WDMS requests all parents model healthy choices and not use any form of tobacco, especially on campus.

No alcoholic beverages may be consumed at the school during regular school hours, when the After School Program is in session, or when children are present at the school. No open consumption of alcoholic beverages will take place during a school-sponsored event when minors are present.

**Dr. Montessori believed in the following:**

* Each child matures or develops at a rate different from that of others. The rate changes over time, thus comparing children of the same age does not produce useful information and causes unnecessary anxiety.
* Encourage children with positive comments. We strongly suggest the school and home use the same philosophy.
* Provide sensible, flexible rules and limits that your children can accept and follow easily. This gives them a sense of security in his/her environment and relationships.
* Always let your children do things for themselves that they are capable of doing independently.
* *Demonstrate* each activity to your child in a slow simple manner with as few words as possible and let him/her try the task. Give time to practice, let your child use real objects.
* Only touch a child when invited to do so.
* Speak only positive comments of every child.
* Be ever ready to answer the call of a child who needs you.
* Respect the child who makes a mistake and then can later correct it.
* Stop immediately and firmly correct any misuse of the environment and any action which endangers the child.
* Treat the child with the best of good manners and offer the best you have of yourself at your disposal.
* While television and computers have vital roles in the household, it is suggested that time for children be limited and guided. A reminder: these two activities take valuable time away which can never be regained.