

Coastal Empire Montessori Academy & Charter School

Family Handbook



2016-17 School Year

Coastal Empire Montessori Academy & Charter School Family Handbook

August 2016

Welcome – or welcome back – to the Coastal Empire Montessori Family! Our schools, the Coastal Empire Montessori Academy (CEMA; Pre-K3 through Pre-K4) and the Coastal Empire Montessori Charter School (CEMCS; Kindergarten through 5th Grade), comprise the only Montessori charter school in Georgia. They are governed by the Coastal Empire Montessori Community Organization (CEMCO), a non-profit organization, whose aim is to provide Chatham County schoolchildren the opportunity to experience educational services based on the teaching philosophy and methodology developed by Dr. Maria Montessori.

Dr. Montessori dedicated her life to working to build an educational method that creates peace in the child and, in turn, in the world. The schools address the education of the whole child and believe, as did Dr. Montessori, that we must start with the child by offering a prepared environment in which s/he is free to develop. Thus, the schools seek to foster the love of learning through the Montessori curriculum in a child-centered environment with specially-designed materials that guide students to success. Our goal is to create intrinsic learners ready for the world!

The schools' adherence to the Montessori philosophy enables students to benefit from instructional strategies that improve their achievement – such as individual instruction, use of sensorial materials, choice in work, looping, and true encouragement of intrinsic motivation. The fact that our schools utilize a lottery-based admission process allows us to provide a Montessori education to a diverse student body representative of the local demographics. A cornerstone of our philosophy is to educate and involve the whole community through parent workshops, open houses, community partnerships, and parent-teacher organization functions. Also fundamental is the primacy of respect – respect for self, for others and for our world – to developing a strong community with a nurturing climate where all persons and viewpoints are valued and where opportunities to grow in awareness and learn from each other are abundant.

Again, welcome to the family. I am honored to be able to partner with you in the education and development of your child.

Stephanie Babcock-Wright, Executive Director

**Coastal Empire Montessori Academy & Charter School
Family Handbook**

Table of Contents

Note: Where the word "school" is used in this handbook as opposed to the word "schools," it simply indicates that the reference is to both CEMA and CEMCS.

WHAT TO EXPECT / SCHOOL DESCRIPTION Pages 5 – 7

The Schools' Expectation of Families
Families' Expectations of the Schools
The Schools' Theory on Discipline
Key Classroom Practices
Equal Opportunity / Non-Discrimination
Confidentiality / Right to Privacy
Free, Public Education and Tuition-funded Education
Financial Liability

GENERAL INFORMATION Pages 7 – 11

Charter School Flexibility
School Affiliation & Accreditation
Board of Trustees
Administrative Team
Faculty
Parents' Right to Know
Child Abuse and Mandated Reporting
Website / Communication
Calendar and Schedule
Class Assignment
Recess
Rest Time
Homework
Progress Reports, Report Cards and Parent Conferences
Response to Intervention (RtI)
Standardized Testing
Before- and After-School Care

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES Pages 12 – 20

Enrollment
Transportation – Bus and Car, Changes to Transportation

Tardy Drop-offs and Pick-ups
Absences
Visitors
Tobacco-free Campus
Nutrition
School Breakfast and Lunch
Dress Code
Code of Conduct
Discipline Policies
Emergency Contact Form / Address Information
School Social Worker
Medication at School
Allergies
Illnesses
Immunizations and Health Information
Emergency Procedures / Severe Weather
Non-instructional Items / Electronic Devices

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT Pages 21 – 23

Orientation and Parent Education
Conferences
Family Service Hours
Family-to-Family Communication
Parent-Teacher Organization
CEMCO Board of Trustees Committees

Coastal Empire Montessori Academy & Charter School Family Handbook

WHAT TO EXPECT / SCHOOL DESCRIPTION

The Schools' Expectations of Parents

The following are some of the basic expectations we have of CEMA/CEMCS parents:

- Acceptance of the Montessori Philosophy and a commitment to expand its tenets into your home life.
- Adherence to the expectations, policies and procedures enumerated in this *Handbook*.
- Attendance at parent functions, workshops, and parent-teacher meetings.
- Timely communication to the teacher(s) and/or administration about your child's needs or a concern.
- Partnership with the teacher(s) and/or administration to set and reinforce goals.
- A positive attitude towards the school you have chosen for your child.

The schools' staff will conduct itself with professionalism, integrity and respect at all times, and the schools expect the same from families. Disrespectful behavior and a disregard for the policies explained in this *Handbook* are unacceptable. Any issues surrounding this point will be addressed by the Executive Director and a mutually-acceptable resolution will be sought. In the event that is not possible, the schools and the family may be required to discontinue their association; this decision remains the right of the schools.

Families' Expectations of the Schools

As an organization, we commit to providing:

- A loving and secure environment.
- Care and respect for your child.
- Faculty and staff who live by the philosophy of the school and follow this *Handbook*.
- Teachers who set rigorous – yet realistic – goals for your child.
- Teachers who provide information about your child's progress.
- Professionalism and integrity.
- Appreciation of your point of view.

The Schools' Theory on Discipline

The emotional development of each child is extremely important to us at CEMA/CEMCS. We believe that each child has an innate goodness that thrives with consistency and clarity. Our basic goal is to help the development of self-discipline, responsibility and courtesy within the child as s/he matures.

To discipline is to teach. Discipline is based on love and logical, natural consequences. Our goal is to develop self-control through intrinsic motivation. Maria Montessori stated in *The Montessori Method*,

"We call an individual disciplined when he is the master of himself, and can, therefore regulate his own conduct when it shall be necessary to follow some rule of life ... The first dawning of real discipline comes through work. At a given moment it happens that a child becomes keenly interested in a piece of work, showing it by the expression of his face, by his intense attention, by his perseverance in the same exercise. That child has set foot upon the road leading to discipline ... The end is obtained, not by attacking the mistake and fighting it, but by developing activity in spontaneous work."

More specific information about the discipline policies of the schools is provided in the Policies and Procedures section of this *Handbook*.

Key Classroom Practices

Families should be aware of these classroom practices and should reiterate and reinforce them at home in order for them to become habit:

- Care for and show respect for yourself, for others and for the environment.
- Walk slowly and speak softly.
- Use two hands to carry any materials.
- Push in your chair when leaving a table.
- Clean up after yourself.
- You may only talk with a person if you interrupt her/him by placing a quiet hand on her/his shoulder and wait for her/him to give you her/his attention.
- You must invite yourself to join someone in their work and s/he has the option to say, "No."
- You must stop, look and listen immediately at the sound of the bell/chime.

Equal Opportunity / Non-Discrimination

The Coastal Empire Montessori Community Organization will provide every child with equal educational opportunities regardless of skin color, creed, gender, national origin, religion, age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability. No child will be excluded on such basis from participating in, or having access to any access of programming, facilities, athletics, counseling, extracurricular activities, or other school resources.

Additionally, in compliance with federal guidance, transgender students are permitted to use restrooms at the schools that match their gender identity.

Confidentiality / Right to Privacy

All records maintained by the schools regarding its students' personal and academic information is private and will be held in the strictest confidence. Only those with legally-proven interests (e.g., court-documented guardianship, legitimate educational interests, etc.) will be able to access the material, and then only when appropriate. It is incumbent upon those alleging such an interest to validate it to the schools' satisfaction; information will not be shared otherwise.

Free, Public Education and Tuition-funded Education

Students enrolled in grades Pre-K4 through 5th Grade will not pay tuition. As a charter school, CEMCS receives public funding through the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System for students in Kindergarten through 5th Grade. The Pre-K4 program at CEMA is sponsored by Bright from the Start, a state-funded program offering preschool to children in Georgia. This is a free program and requires no tuition.

Students enrolled in the Pre-K3 program at CEMA will be required to pay tuition. Neither the State of Georgia nor the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System provides funds for 3-year olds, therefore it is necessary for CEMA to collect tuition to support this program. CEMCO is a non-profit organization; as such any funds received, including tuition, are directed to the education of the children attending its schools.

Financial Liability

If a family has received a service from CEMA/CEMCS with an associated cost (e.g., Pre-K3 tuition, Extended Care tuition or late pick-up charges; more information is provided herein), those debts are expected to be paid in a timely manner. If an account goes past due, a family will be expected to present an acceptable payment arrangement to the Business Office and/or Executive Director. Not doing so may result in a loss of services or an inability to remain enrolled at the schools.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Charter School Flexibility

Pursuant to O.C.G.A. §20-2-2065 and Georgia State Board of Education Rule 1 60-4-9.04, the Charter School shall be waived from state and local rule regulations, policies and procedures and/or provisions of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia, other than the provisions of the Charter School Act of 1998. The charter school shall not be subject to the provisions of this title or any state or local rule, regulation, policy, or procedure relating to schools within an applicable school system regardless of whether such rule, regulations, policy, or procedure is established by the local board, the state board, or the Department of Education; provided, however, that the

state board may establish rules, regulations, policies, or procedures consistent with this article relating to charter schools. In exchange for such a waiver, the charter school agrees to meet or exceed the performance based goals included in the charter and approved by the local board and will comply with all the requirements of the single statewide accountability system.

School Affiliation & Accreditation

CEMA/CEMCS is a Montessori Educational Programs International (MEPI)-affiliated site. CEMCS is fully-accredited as an elementary school by the Georgia Accrediting Commission.

Board of Trustees

The schools are governed by the Coastal Empire Montessori Community Organization (CEMCO), a non-profit group of volunteers who work together to fulfill the mission of the school. All Trustees, who are interested parents and community members, undergo training and bring many resources to the Board and schools.

Board Meetings are open to the public and are held monthly as indicated on the CEMCO website. Interested individuals may gain information about or apply for Board membership via the website.

Administrative Team

An administrative team is in place to support the mission of the schools. The team consists of an Executive Director, a Head of Montessori Curriculum and Instruction, and a Business Manager. This team is supported by a Student Health and Information Specialist, an Accounts Manager and an Administrative Assistant. All staff work in conjunction with the teaching team to run the day-to-day operations of the organization.

Faculty

The faculty members at Coastal Empire Montessori Academy & Charter School are highly-trained professionals. Each Lead Teacher holds a teaching certificate from the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and undergoes training in Montessori Education. Parents will be informed about any exceptions to this rule. Teaching Assistants hold degrees and must undergo Montessori Assistant training. Additional instructional support is provided by a Special Education Department and a Response to Intervention (RtI) Coordinator. Numerous opportunities for staff development and training are provided on an ongoing basis by the Head of Montessori Curriculum and Instruction and through Montessori and other partners.

Parents' Right to Know

Parents have the right to know the qualifications of their child's teacher in a timely manner. In compliance with statutory requirements, parents may request information about the professional qualifications of their child's teacher(s). The following may be requested:

- Whether the teacher has met the Georgia Professional Standards Commission requirements for certification for the grade level and subject areas in which the teacher provides instruction;
- Whether the teacher is teaching under an emergency or other provisional status through which Georgia qualifications or certification have been waived;
- The college major and any graduate certification or degree held by the teacher;
- Whether the student is provided services by paraprofessionals, and if so, their qualifications.

Parents will be notified if their child is being taught for 20 consecutive days by a teacher or a paraprofessional who has been determined non-HiQ. Please contact the Executive Director with any questions.

Child Abuse and Mandated Reporting

CEMA/CEMCS does not tolerate any type of abuse of children. Staff members are educated on how to identify such abuse and are informed of their duty to report suspected abuse. Every staff member is a mandated reporter. It is not within any person's discretion to decide whether abuse has or hasn't occurred; s/he is simply required by law to report if there is any suspicion. Staff members who neglect to report potential abuse put their jobs at risk. Please understand that it is no one's wish to create an uncomfortable situation, but the needs and safety of the children and the requirements of law are always paramount.

Website / Communication

The success of our schools' business depends on strong communication between school and home. The school will communicate with families in a variety of ways – the two main ones being the school's website (www.cemco.org) and your child's communication folder. You will also receive email from "cemcssav@gmail.com" and occasional phone calls from an automated call-out system. In addition, teachers communicate with parents often, their preferred methods for doing so varying by the individual.

Calendar and Schedule

CEMA/CEMCS follow the instructional calendar set by the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System unless otherwise noted. It is standard practice for our school calendar to contain one or more Conference (non-instructional) Days; these will be noted on the school-wide calendar well in advance and communicated about often. The calendar can be found on both the SCCPSS's website as well as the CEMCO website. In addition, each teacher prepares a weekly or monthly newsletter that highlights any holidays, special events, or other variations in the daily schedule.

School Office hours: 8:30 – 5:00 weekdays

Teaching Staff hours: 8:45 - 4:45 weekdays

Appointments should be made to meet with any staff here at the school so that we are able to give full attention to your needs. Teachers are not able to meet with parents on a pop-in basis. Appointments with teachers should be made through the teacher's email, which will be provided to you at the beginning of the school year. Appointments with administrators should be made through the Administrative Assistant in the Main Office.

Class Assignment

Great care is given annually to the assignment of students, both new and returning, to classes. We seek both diversity and balance in our learning environments, and building rosters is a collaborative effort among the administration and the teaching staff. Class changes will happen very infrequently throughout the year and should not be requested by a family as a general practice.

Recess

Recess is an important part of the daily schedule, so unless the weather prevents it, students will go outside every day for recess. Please have your child dress appropriately for the weather and wear shoes appropriate for outdoor play (sturdy with closed toes). Children who are dressed inappropriately may be asked to refrain from certain play for safety reasons.

Rest Time

Rest time is required for all students in CEMA (Pre-K). Parents are asked to supply something on which their child may nap, which will be indicated on the school supply list. This item should be free of cartoon characters, as items with these designs are not permitted at school. Naps are crucial for the brain to get what it needs to efficiently process information. Getting your child into a good nap pattern that matches ours here at school can help the child transition to sleep better. Even if a child is unwilling to nap, providing the time daily to lay down for a quiet time with a book for the same time they do at school will help their bodies get the rest they need to make it through the day.

After lunch, children will clean up and then lay down for approximately one hour; after that time, students are able to rise or continue to sleep depending on their needs. Students in CEMCS (K and up) will not be required to take a nap; many classes do have quiet time, and all children are encouraged to sit and read if they are fatigued. In a typical Montessori fashion, we follow the needs of the child and allow for options in this area.

Homework

We believe that homework should be developmentally-appropriate, meaningful, and supportive of our educational goals. We also strongly feel that students need to make family connections, engage in extracurricular activities, and relax after school and on the weekends. That said, each night we expect children to spend some time studying: all students are to read or be read to for

at least 30 minutes and elementary students will likely have math, spelling and vocabulary work regularly. Specific assignments will vary by level and/or teacher.

Progress Reports, Report Cards and Parent Conferences

Progress Reports and Report Cards are both provided four times throughout the year, usually according to the SCCPSS calendar. They serve as mid-quarter and end-of-the-quarter checks on your child's academic and developmental progress and are one of the main tools of communication between teachers and parents. Often times, these documents will be supplemented with other reports, documents, or test scores as appropriate.

In addition, parent conferences are held two times during the year – once each in the fall and spring. Of course, parents are welcome to request a meeting at any time, but please remember to schedule a mutually-agreed-upon time directly with the teacher via email or by sending a note in with your child.

Response to Intervention (RtI)

If a student experiences academic or behavioral challenges at school, the Response to Intervention (RtI) Process is used to provide him/her with immediate, targeted, classroom-based support. The process is geared to each student's learning needs, with teaching staff implementing interventions appropriate for the child and the situation. Progress monitoring is also done so that student progress can be measured regularly.

Parents will be notified by the school if it is determined that their child will enter the RtI process. Meetings will be held between the RtI team and the parents so that the entire process can be communicated about and understood by all parties.

Standardized Testing

Due to the fact that CEMCS is a charter school, we are bound by Georgia Law to follow state-mandated testing requirements. Therefore, Kindergarten students will participate in the GKIDS assessment and 3rd – 5th graders will participate in the Georgia Milestones Assessment System. Testing dates are established by the state; the school will communicate about these tests well in advance of their administration. Parents will be notified in writing of the results of their child's test when they become available. Any questions that you may have about testing should be directed to the Head of Montessori Curriculum and Instruction or the Executive Director.

Before- and After-School Care

Two different programs are offered at the school for before- and after-school care. For our 3- and 4-year-old students, we offer CEMA Extended Care, and for our older students, the YMCA provides their Pryme Tyme program. Extended Care is housed in one of our classrooms and Pryme Tyme operates out of the Multi-Purpose Room. Information can be obtained and

registration can be made for these programs through the Main Office for Extended Care (912-395-4070) and the Pryme Tyme Office for Pryme Tyme (912-351-3622).

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Enrollment

Under charter law, enrollment preference is given to siblings of currently-enrolled students, to students moving up from the CEMA Pre-K4, and to students of trustees, teachers and staff at CEMA/CEMCS. CEMA Pre-K3 students are permitted to be awarded enrollment preference into Pre-K4; this preference will be revoked, however, if the student's enrollment status in Pre-K3 is not in good standing (i.e., delinquent tuition account).

Once admitted to CEMCS (K-5th grade), students do not have to reapply for subsequent years, however, an Intent to Return Form will be requested yearly.

The Administration establishes the number of positions available at each grade level and students are selected during a public lottery annually. Residency in Chatham County is the only prerequisite for application. All applicants who have submitted a timely and complete application are either selected or wait-listed. As positions become available during the spring and summer, families are contacted in order from the wait lists. Registration paperwork is supplied and collected throughout this time as families work with the schools to complete the required documentation for enrollment.

Transportation

Bus

Countywide bus transportation is provided to the school so that geographical location is not a barrier to attendance. Any child in Pre-K4 and up may ride the bus and existing bus routes may be reworked to accommodate new riders. Departure and arrival times may fluctuate. The SCCPSS Transportation Department provides bus service for our students, and all bus-related questions and concerns should be directed to them at 912-395-5591. If ongoing issues are not properly addressed by Transportation, please contact the Executive Director.

Bus safety is critical for our students and requires that all parties to take responsibility for bus conduct. Children should understand and be able to repeat the rules of the bus and be encouraged at both home and school to adhere to them. School administration works with the Transportation Department to ensure safety on the busses.

Car

Many of our students are car riders. Here are a few important points regarding car drop-off and pick-up:

- Parking spaces in front of the big buildings (parallel spaces around the curve) are reserved for buses and delivery – please park in a space in the parking lot or on the grass overflow. Please note, however, that there should be no parking during drop-off or pick-up, as all children are received and dismissed through the car / bus line.
- Always place your pick-up sign on your dash as you pull onto school grounds.
- Absolutely no cell phone use is permitted during drop-off and pick-up so as to maintain safety for all. The line will be stopped if you are using your phone.
- Refrain from conversations with teachers during this time, as that greatly impedes the flow of traffic.
- Please stay in your car during drop off. A staff member will assist your child out of the car and along the sidewalk to his/her classroom.
- Please wait to drive onward after being stopped until a staff member waves you on. Never pull out from behind another vehicle and pull forward around the lot.
- Please stay in your car during afternoon pick-up. We only dismiss children to busses and cars in car line; we do not dismiss children to family members with cars parked in the lot.
- Be sure that car seats are installed on the proper side of the car for efficient loading.
- We may be unable to load a child into any vehicle that does not have an age-appropriate car seat. Similarly, you may be cited by law enforcement and/or we may be mandated as reporters to file a report.
- Your child will be escorted to your car by a teacher. Make sure whoever picks up your child is on the designated list and has a tag on their dashboard – always be prepared to show identification.
- If your child is unable to secure his/her own seatbelt, please pull out and over to the side of the exit driveway (on the way out to the street) before pulling over to assist him/her.

Changes to Transportation

It is critical that the school has correct information in a timely manner on a daily basis in order to get all students home safely. Any transportation changes must be relayed to the student's teacher in advance, preferably via a written note, and a call should be made to the Main Office for back-up. Do not rely on day-of emails to communicate this information, as we cannot respond properly. Except in the case of a rare emergency, we cannot accept last-minute (after 3:00 PM) transportation changes.

Tardy Drop-offs and Pick-ups

Drop-off

Drop-off begins at 8:50 AM daily; no student may arrive at school prior to this time unless enrolled in before-school care. The procedures listed in the above section will be followed until 9:15 AM, when the morning "tardy bell" rings. Any student arriving after 9:15 will be required to be signed in by an adult at the Main Office and provided with a Tardy Documentation Slip in

order to be admitted to class. In addition, no student arriving after 9:15 AM will be eligible to participate in school breakfast.

Tardiness is strongly discouraged – please strive to have your child on time to school every day. Being tardy has negative ramifications on the child, his/her classmates and teachers and on the classroom routines and daily procedures. The schools will communicate with families on an individual basis about tardies if a pattern is noticed, and you will be asked to develop a new practice for your morning routine as soon as possible. Families that are chronically tardy will be asked to meet with the Executive Director in order to create a tardy elimination plan.

Pick-up

No pick-ups are permitted after 3:40 daily. After this time, students will be dismissed via the car line once afternoon dismissal begins.

Afternoon pick-up ends promptly at 4:25. If your child is not picked up by this time, you will need to sign him/her out from the Main Office prior to 4:40. If your child is still not picked up at this time, s/he will be admitted to the CEMA Extended Care program and charged the applicable fee. You are expected to pay the late fees at the time of pick-up but will be invoiced by the Business Office for them if not.

Please note that this arrangement is not a substitute for establishing a regular childcare option; if a pattern of late pick-up is established, parents will be required to meet with the Executive Director to come to an alternate agreement.

Absences

Any child absent from school must provide a note indicating why s/he was absent. Parents may write 5 notes of excuse for a year; any additional excuse notes must be doctor's notes or note from a governmental agency. Notes may be written and sent in with a student or dropped off in the Main Office; they may also be emailed to your child's teacher. All emails must be specific, including the child's name, date(s) absent and the reason for the absence.

Any child missing more than 10 days a year may be retained. After 3 absences, you may be contacted by a School Social Worker. Parents may be required to meet with the Executive Director in order to create a truancy elimination plan.

It is imperative that children attend school on-time and stay for the full day daily. Please minimize absences as much as possible. As schools of choice, CEMA/CEMCS maintains the right to enact supplementary policies regarding attendance at any time; adherence to such policies would be required for continued enrollment in the schools.

Visitors

The schools' Administration and faculty encourage visitation at CEMA/CEMCS and believe that there are many benefits that can come from community involvement. At the same time, they have a legitimate interest in avoiding disruption to the educational process and protecting the safety and welfare of the children and staff. A balance must be achieved between the potential benefits and risks associated with the presence of visitors in our building. As much as practicable, please pre-plan all visits and provide the proper notification to the teacher or the Main Office in advance of your visit.

All visitors to the school, without exception, must sign in at the Main Office on every visit, regardless of the reason. Employees are mandated to require visitors show a Visitor's Sticker with the current date on it before conducting any business with them, including releasing a child. While on campus, please be prepared to show ID if asked at any time.

Unless s/he has been vetted by the school and passed a background check, no volunteer may be alone with children at the school. Any visitor to the classroom must understand that the classroom is a special place and certain rules are in place for all persons entering the classroom.

Tobacco-free Campus

In consideration of the reports of the Surgeon General of the United States, and in keeping with the School's intent to provide a safe and healthy environment, the following applies:

No student, staff member or school visitor is permitted to use any tobacco product, including an e-cigarette, at any time, including non-school hours (24 hours per day, 7 days per week): 1) in any building, facility, or vehicle owned, leased, rented or chartered by CEMA/CEMCS, 2) on any school grounds and property – including athletic fields and parking lots – owned, leased or rented by CEMA/CEMCS, or 3) at any school-sponsored or school-related event on- or off-campus.

Nutrition

As a physician, Dr. Montessori believed in the importance of good nutrition to a child's development; as more research becomes available regarding the impact of various foods on the body, we can understand why she felt this to be so vital. At our schools, we strive to have each child eat in a healthy way and have implemented a nutrition policy to support the growth of our students' bodies and minds.

When packing for school, please remember to avoid foods that have hydrogenated vegetable oil, refined sugars, or are processed or full of preservatives. Please also note that we ask that some food items simply are never included as part of the food you send to school with your student(s); see the list below.

Do not send the following foods to school:

Chocolate
Juice
Cookies

Candy
Carbonated beverages
Fast food

Pudding or Jello
Potato or corn chips
Quick-packaged lunches

A note will be sent home with children who bring any of these foods in their lunch, and the food will usually be sent home as well (as long as we can ensure they are provided with a healthy alternative here at school). Please do not persist in sending your student with food that gets sent home or about which a note gets sent home.

Over the years here at CEMA / CEMCS, the guiding rule of thumb that has emerged is that if a food is not processed and contains 9g or fewer of sugar per serving, it is likely acceptable. If a food has language such as “no sugar added” or “all natural” on its packaging, it may also be a good choice and may allow us to consider higher amounts of sugar, In addition, please note:

- The only permissible options for students’ drinks are plain water or white milk.
- It is preferred that tubed yogurt and squeezable applesauce, etc. are packed in a bowl at home so that they may be eaten with a spoon at school.

Additionally, please be aware that individual classrooms or buildings on campus may have specific dietary requirements due to allergies of class members and this information will be relayed by teachers.

School Breakfast and Lunch

In addition to the option of bringing home lunch, students at CEMA/CEMCS may participate in the SCCPSS’s school nutrition program, whereby they may eat breakfast (for free) and/or purchase lunch provided by the system’s food service. Lunch applications will be sent home by the schools each year and families may apply for free- or reduced-price-lunch benefits. Meals are prepared off-site and brought to our campus daily.

Information about establishing online lunch money accounts for students will also be sent home. Whether parents use this option or send in money with their child, note that credit is not applied to the account for 24 hours.

Lunch orders must be called in by 9:45 AM if your child is running late.

Dress Code

Uniforms are required for students in grades PK3 – 5th Grade. The goal underlying our dress code is to support a safe, distraction-free learning environment for your children.

- Uniform top colors: grey, navy or white
- Uniform bottom colors: khaki or navy, navy plaid
- Additional notes about uniform requirements:

- Girls of all ages should wear shorts underneath their skirts, as they are active here at school.
- Shoes are to be closed in front and closed or strapped in the back – no sandals or flip flops. Also no high heels or shoes that flash are allowed.
- Skirts and shorts must fall within 3 inches of the knee.
- No cartoon/other characters are allowed on any clothing (including jackets and shoes) or accessories (e.g., lunch boxes, water bottles). *This applies on dress-down days as well.

The rationale underlying schools' ban on cartoon characters is grounded in our Montessori philosophy. Dr. Montessori believed that the universe is a wonderful creation and that, in order to truly allow young children to experience this wonder, it is critical to ground them in concrete reality, as their ability to discern what is real and what is not real is not yet in place. Montessori discouraged the use of fantastical play and images until after reality is established and the child develops into being capable of more abstract thought. Montessori stated that "the true basis of the imagination is reality," and research shows that intelligence is developed by critical analysis of perceived reality, not through fantasy and make-believe. Imagination is based on the senses and is firmly tied to reality and therefore we believe that cartoon characters are inappropriate for school wear.

Students will be given a warning if they are out of uniform and a note will be sent home with them that day. If a student comes out of uniform on a second occasion, the parent will be called to bring an appropriate change of clothes to school. The school uniform closet may contain items for those who are missing pieces, but it does not substitute for coming from home in the proper uniform.

Wet or Soiled Clothing

Individual teachers will inform parents on their supply lists whether they request a change of clothes to be sent in and kept at school. If your child has an accident at school and does not have a uniform on-hand into which to change, you will be called to bring clothing to the school. If the accident involves solid waste, you will be called in order to change your child, as school staff is unable to handle these incidents. In both cases, the expectation is that you or an emergency contact arrives at the school within 30 minutes.

If chronic accidents and clothing changes become a pattern, a meeting with the Head of Montessori Curriculum and Instruction and the Executive Director will be set up to discuss ways to assist the child and the teachers in handling the situation.

Code of Conduct

Because we are a locally-approved charter school, we familiarize ourselves annually with the policies in the *SCCPSS Student Code of Conduct* and use it as a general reference document. The

Code of Conduct can be found on our website should you wish to review it, however, the system of expectations and consequences that comprise the *Coastal Empire Montessori Partners Compact* and which are implemented through the schools' discipline plan is the primary guiding framework for both CEMA and CEMCS.

Discipline Policies

As explained earlier in this handbook, the core of our discipline policy centers on the development of self-control within the child and the continual demonstration of respect for self, others and the environment by all. This process is guided and supported by the teaching staff and administration through the use of natural consequences. A multiplicity of efforts are made within the classroom in order to minimize discipline issues and to assist struggling students, and the partnership between teachers and families is incredibly important in this regard.

Because of this, parent contact forms the foundation of our schools' discipline policy. Parents can expect to be communicated with in multiple ways by the schools, and teachers look to parents to support their children, reinforce school policies and teacher requests, and to dialogue with them about the best ways to accomplish goals. If problematic issues develop, the child will be redirected, conferenced with, modeled for, and reminded repeatedly; the parent will be contacted via note, email and/or phone call if the issues persist.

Students, parents and school staff make a serious commitment to one another when they embark on educational journeys here at CEMA/CEMCS. As a sign of this, and in order to make rights and expectations very clear, all students are required to sign the *Coastal Empire Montessori Partners Compact* along with their parent(s), teachers, and school administration. This critical document is a key piece of the school's holistic education system.

Beyond this, and for more serious issues, referrals to the office may be written by members of the school staff. Consequences are laid out for specific types of incidents and behavior, through a progressive, hierarchical model of discipline. This progression is explained in the *CEMCO Incident-Behavior – Consequence Rubric (I-BCR)*, which will be explained to all students and provided to all families. Consideration is given to a holistic view of each child and each incident's circumstances. Consequences include such things as parental notifications, parent conferences, loss of privileges, warnings, required assignments, mandatory parent observations, modified schedules, out-of-school suspension, and dismissal from the school.

Any consequences enacted that result in a loss of privileges or inability to attend school also apply / carry over to before- and after-school care, extracurricular activities and school events both on and off campus.

Finally, please note that as CEMCS is a charter school, it has been legally granted flexibility by the State of GA and the SCCPSS to make, implement and execute its own policies and procedures.

The schools have done so with the goals of supporting the holistic education of every child and providing a positive learning environment for all.

Emergency Contact Form / Address Information

At the beginning of the year, we require that you complete an Emergency Contact Form. When completing this form, make sure to be specific in who is able to pick up your child in case of an emergency. This is the only information that we have in case of an emergency, and we will not release your child to anyone who is not on the form. At any time, you may change or add to this form by visiting the Main Office and speaking to an office staff member. It is critical that you keep this form updated.

Additionally, as Chatham County residency is required for enrollment in our schools, you may be asked annually to submit proof of address in the form of a utility bill, mortgage/lease statement or governmental mail. If your family moves out of Chatham County, you must notify the school within 2 weeks of the move and the Executive Director will advise on the course of action for your child's enrollment.

School Social Worker

From time to time, the school may contact the School Social Worker assigned to it by the SCCPSS in order to refer a matter regarding a child. It may be a mandated reporting situation or done out of consideration for a student's welfare, but in any case, it remains the right – and duty – of the school to make this referral. The School Social Worker is not an employee of the Department of Family and Child Services (DFCS) and is contacted only to assist a family in accessing appropriate and available resources.

Medication at School

Medications can be administered at school if your child is in need during the day. For this to be done, a parent must complete a Medication Permission Form and return it to school with the medication in its original container, with its original directions. Forms can be obtained in the Main Office, and please note that students may not transport medication. All medications will be discarded at the end of the school year if not picked up and taken home.

Sunscreen, lotion and bug spray are considered medications for procedural purposes and the above protocol should be followed in order to have those items utilized at school. It is preferred that these items are applied on your child before leaving the house, however.

Allergies

Please make sure to write on the Emergency Contact Form all of the allergies that your child has. If your child has a severe allergy, please make sure to alert your teacher and provide medical documentation to the administration so that we can all help ensure his/her safety. The School

Health Specialist will be able to provide a Diet Order Form for you to complete if your child needs a special lunch.

Illnesses

From time to time, students become sick at school. We reserve the right as a charter school to send your child home if s/he has a fever above 99.9 degrees, is vomiting/has diarrhea, has an undetermined rash, or has nits or head lice. Students who are sent home with a fever, vomiting, or diarrhea must remain fever-, vomit-, or diarrhea-free for 24 hours before returning to school. Doctor's clearance needs to be given to children with rashes or head lice before they may return to school.

Please plan ahead regarding what you will do if your child has an illness at school. We expect parents to be prompt in pick-up (within 60 minutes at the longest), as sick children are uncomfortable and in need of your care. Remember that no one is able to pick up your child unless s/he is on your child's Emergency Contact Form under persons allowed to pick-up.

Immunizations and Health Information

A current immunization record and EED needs to be on file for all students; if this information is not up-to-date or on file, it may jeopardize your child's attendance. Exemptions from immunizations must be documented on the GA Department of Public Health's Form 2208.

It is imperative that you inform the school if any changes occur with a student's health or medication plan, including information on allergies and medical conditions, and medications that your child takes. This paperwork will accompany your child to the hospital in the event of an emergency.

Emergency Procedures / Severe Weather

The schools maintain a comprehensive *Emergency Response and Preparedness Plan* that guides policies and procedures in severe or emergency situations.

Keep aware and informed about the weather and any possible weather-related concerns. Parents will be contacted via email, phone, the school website, and/or the parent page on Facebook to pick-up children in case of an emergency. School closings and delays will also be posted. We follow SCCPSS delays and closings, which are reported by the local media. Parents and guardians should have a plan in place as early as possible for any of these emergency situations. Before- and after-care is not available under emergency conditions

Non-instructional Items / Toys, Cell Phones and Electronic Devices

Toys, cell phones, and electronic devices (unless specifically authorized) are prohibited from school and will be stored until the end of the day if children bring them on campus. If students have items taken away more than once, they will be held until a parent can pick them up. It is

understandable that children may need to carry a cell phone to stay safe from the bus to home. Please make your child aware that cell phones need to be turned off and kept in their bags for the time that they are at the bus stop, on the bus, or a school.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Orientation and Parent Education

As the only school of its kind in the state, there is nothing more important to us than the strength of a united community. We seek, through both of our schools, to not only educate children as they grow in the world but also to enrich families, our neighbors and colleagues, and ourselves on an ongoing basis. To this end, we host numerous events at the school over the course of the year that both inform and educate stakeholders about our schools' practices and procedures and about the Montessori Philosophy and Method and education more generally.

These events include Open Houses, Parent and Student Orientations, Back-to-School Nights, grade-level-specific information nights, Parent-Teacher Organization events, guest speaker sessions, and school-wide special events. We welcome families to the school for many different purposes and are confident that doing so forms the foundation for our program and our school community.

Additionally, the parents of all new students are asked at the time of registration to complete a Montessori Parent Questionnaire. This document gives the school valuable information that allows us to individualize both instruction for the student and parent education programming for the year.

Conferences

Twice-yearly parent-teacher conferences are vital to the Montessori program at CEMA/CEMCS because they not only allow parents a chance to learn about their child's progress, but they also forge the bond of communication between home and family. The SCCPSS School Year Calendar no longer provides for any conference days, so the CEMCO Calendar has been modified to build in these very important components. One day will be in the fall and the other will be in the spring; information about Conference Days will be posted on the calendar in advance and sent home near the beginning of each school year.

Procedures for Scheduling

Instructional time is valuable and may not be interrupted. Impromptu conferences during the school day are not permitted. This includes arrival and dismissal time as teachers are required to monitor and supervise their students, their classrooms and the hallway. Teachers are not

permitted to stop and discuss matters with parents during instruction or while on duty. Please contact your child's teacher by phone, written note or email to request a conference. Conferences can be scheduled during the teacher's planning time during the school day if it does not conflict with grade level/instructional meetings, before school and after school. Please contact teachers to schedule a conference at least 48 hours in advance.

Family Service Hours

Families of children enrolled at CEMA/CEMCS are encouraged to participate with the organization by dedicating at least 40 hours a year for two-parent households and 20 hours a year for one-parent households. Families can participate in many ways, including, but not limited to:

- Attending workshops on the Montessori Philosophy and other special topics at the school,
- Providing service hours throughout the year by helping with various school-wide projects,
- Participating in the PTO and/or the CEMCO Board, and
- Volunteering in classrooms.

While contributions in the form of time/activity are preferred, Family Service Hours are also able to be completed by monetary or material contributions. Purchasing supplies for the classrooms or school and making donations count as service. Guidelines for this practice are on the website and will be provided by the school at the beginning of the year.

Parents are asked to keep track of their hours on an online system on www.cemco.org. Information will be provided by the school on the guidelines and mechanics of logging service hours; it is also available on the website. Families who believe they are unable to meet the requested number of Family Service Hours should speak to the Executive Director.

Family-to-Family Communication

The schools recognize that communication among students and families outside of school contributes to making our community strong. Methods for communication and contact among families will vary by class (e.g., class calendar, class social media page, etc.), but please note that the school will not share parent contact information. In addition, teachers are unable to systematically facilitate the passing of information from one family to another, such as by distributing party invitations from one classmate out to others.

Parent-Teacher Organization

The Coastal Empire Montessori Charter School Parent-Teacher Organization is active on campus. Involvement in this group is an excellent way to maintain connections with the school, become involved in various projects and activities, and help enhance your child's educational experience. Meetings are held several times per year and numerous special events are also held. Information

on registration / membership and details on plans and events will be provided on multiple occasions throughout the school year and can be found at www.cemcspto.org. PTO participation counts toward Family Service Hours.

CEMCO Board of Trustees Committees

The CEMCO Board of Trustees is comprised of approximately 7 – 9 members, but it operates 5 fully-functional and targeted committees that include many other contributors and are designed to support various areas of the schools' operations. Family and community members are welcome and encouraged to become active on CEMCO Board Committees; the time commitment is less than that for general Board membership and the specific nature of the committees' work allows for expertise and various experience to be of great benefit.

The CEMCO Board of Trustees operates the following committees:

- Academic Excellence Committee
- Finance and Facilities Committee
- Marketing and Community Outreach Committee
- Human Resources Committee
- Governance Committee

Committees meet monthly at standing times and priorities and workload vary depending on school business. Committee membership is achieved through contacting any one of the Trustees, whose names and contact information are available on www.cemco.org. CEMCO Board participation counts toward Family Service Hours.