

April 3, 2020

Dear Montessori Families,

How are you? How are you—really? This is a question asked most sincerely, because we understand that your world has been upended. We know that many of you are trying to work at home and facilitate your children's education at the same time. You enrolled your children in our schools for good reasons—for the strong academics, for the respectful social environment, and for what has been referred to by many parents as a guilt-free day. You could trust that your children would be treated with kindness and love until you returned. And now all of that has changed, and no one is sure when things will return to normal.

As most of you have heard, yesterday Governor Whitmer closed all public and private school buildings for the remainder of the school year. This was a decision aimed at slowing, and ultimately stopping, the spread of the coronavirus that has ravaged Southeast Michigan. While we were not surprised, and fully support the Governor's decision, we also need to let you know specifically how our schools are affected.

1. Our schools are NOT closed—only our buildings are—and we will welcome your children back to distance learning this coming Monday, April 6.

Our teachers at all levels established their online presence through Google Classroom on day two of the original mandated order, and have continued to deliver curriculum since March 18. (Public schools have until April 28 to begin online instruction. We are five weeks ahead of that schedule.)

2. The elementary and middle school levels will not, by the Governor's directive, return to their physical classrooms for the duration of the 2019-20 school year. However, the ruling does not apply to Plymouth-Canton Montessori, Livonia Montessori, or the early childhood portion (Toddler and 3-6 Levels) at Dearborn Heights Montessori. We call these top-quality institutions "schools" because they deliver superior educational programs, but in the eyes of our LARA regulators, they are licensed child care centers.

Child care centers are currently closed under Executive Order 2020-21 (Temporary requirement to suspend activities that are not necessary to sustain or protect life), which took effect on March 24, and ends April 13. This same order closed many stores and non-essential businesses. We expect the order to be extended to the end of April, and possibly beyond, but when it is lifted, we will have the choice to reopen. That decision will be determined by factors not known at this time.

3. Some things we will (regrettably) not be doing when we thought we would be:

- Out-of-state travel for upper elementary and Middle School students has been canceled.
- Standardized testing (Iowa test) for students in Grade 3 and above will not take place.
- Other scheduled field trips and in-house presentations have been canceled or postponed.
- Open houses have been postponed.

4. Things we WILL be doing, although not necessarily in the ways we originally thought:

- Eighth-grade graduation will take place in a fashion yet to be determined, but the hard work and long experience of this terrific group of students will not go unrecognized.
- Teachers will continue to deliver the Montessori curriculum in a variety of ways that are suitable to the ages of the children they serve. As students and teachers grow more comfortable with the rhythm of online instruction, we expect to see ongoing progress.

- Attendance will be taken, and achievement will be tracked in a manner appropriate to the students' ages, through Montessori Compass at DHMC and Montessori Records Express (MRX) in Canton and Livonia.
- We will be enrolling/re-enrolling for the 2020-21 school year. Our teachers are looking forward to welcoming returning students and getting to know their new class members. This process was about to get underway when COVID-19 rose to the top of the agenda.
- At this writing, we are planning to have summer programs at all three locations. Stay tuned for more information.

In talking with teachers, what has been most striking about their response to the pandemic is not what we expected, given the rapidly changing circumstances in which we all find ourselves. It would not have been surprising to hear about the challenges of learning to use (and using!) new platforms, or how much harder and more time-consuming it is to deliver distance learning lessons, because all teachers are experiencing these things. Instead, what we heard is that *they miss the children*. They miss the impromptu conversations, they miss seeing up close the satisfaction children take in their accomplishments, they miss the joy of the “Ah-ha!” moments that happen so often in a Montessori class. Every single teacher is anxious to be with your children—in person—again.

A handful of parents have asked about tuition payments. Almost all families have accepted their child's teacher's invitation to join Google Classroom. Those few who haven't are missing the resources available to parents, and concurrently depriving their children of significant educational opportunities and the chance to connect with their classmates and teachers. Our talented, creative teachers are working overtime to provide as much relevant curriculum as they are able, and are committed to doing so to the end of the school year. We feel that although it takes a different form, our staff is delivering “real school” and that tuition payments for the classroom portion of the day are appropriate.

However, for families whose children are enrolled in full day care (the program with a half-day Montessori class and the remainder of the day in the day care rooms) we feel an adjustment should be made. You are paying for child care, and that service is not happening. What we haven't figured out yet is the form the adjustment will take, and we ask that you bear with us until we do.

We want to be in existence when this pandemic ends, and since you have thoughtfully researched and chosen our schools for your children, we assume that you have a similar desire. We are paying our staff during this crisis because we want them to still be there for your children when we reopen. There are new Federal programs that may be helpful to us, but as of this writing they have not yet been fully implemented.

So, thank you for your patience. Thank you for sticking with us. And thank you for the gift of your children. They are the real reason you are reading this very long letter and we are writing it.

Please stay well,

Kay Neff and Laura Springer