



**Family Handbook**  
**2018-19**

**July 18, 2018**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>WELCOME</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>WHY MONTESSORI?</b>	<b>8</b>
Social Reform in Action	8
The Method	8
The Breakthrough Montessori Model	9
Equity at Breakthrough: Our Statement of Values	9
<b>FURTHER READING</b>	<b>11</b>
Books by Maria Montessori	11
Books Related to the Montessori Experience	11
Recommended Books on Childrearing and Family Life	11
Libros en Español	12
Useful Catalogs	12
Useful Websites	12
<b>BMPCS GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	<b>13</b>
Mission	13
Leadership and Governance	13
Coaching Model	13
Equity at Breakthrough	14
Admission	16
Calendar	16
School Day Schedule	17
Arrival & Dismissal Schedule	17
Arrival Procedures	17
Dismissal Procedures	18
Attendance	20
Appropriate Dress	22
Two Campus Arrangement (2018-2021)	22
<b>OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM</b>	<b>24</b>
Overview	24
Primary	25
Elementary	25
Extended Day	26
Assessment	26
Student Placement and Transitions	27
<b>COMMUNITY, RESPECT, AND DISCIPLINE</b>	<b>29</b>
General Expectations	29
Unacceptable Behaviors	30
Resolution for Unacceptable Behaviors	30

Resolving Complaints	32
<b>FAMILIES: A VITAL PARTNERSHIP</b>	<b>33</b>
Getting Involved	34
Governance	35
Communication	35
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	<b>39</b>
Emergency Records	39
Illness	39
Medication	40
Food, Nutrition, and Community	41
Bathroom Independence	42
Car Seat Safety	43
Security	43
Emergency Preparedness	43

## **WELCOME**

Welcome to Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School. We are delighted you have chosen BMPCS as an educational home for your child and just as pleased to be serving your entire family through our Montessori program.

This handbook is an effort to work together in the interest of children and families. It opens with the Partnership Agreement. We hope you will take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with this document. It responds to two questions: “What can you expect of BMPCS?” and “What will BMPCS expect of you?” Our goal is to communicate as clearly as possible what we can expect of each other and to eliminate the frustration and disappointment that result when unstated expectations go unmet.

We invite you to familiarize yourself with this Family Handbook and to use it as a reference tool. If you have questions, please ask. If you have suggestions, we welcome them.

We welcome you and your children to a year of discovery and growth.

## THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Breakthrough Montessori is a family-centered learning community: we take seriously our commitment to serve not only children enrolled in the School but the entire family. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations. Choosing to attend BMPCS means agreeing to a set of expectations related to the School's mission, operating principles, and policies. Likewise, BMPCS makes a similar commitment to welcome, nurture, and serve the entire family. These commitments are described here.

### **Q. What can I expect of the School academically?**

***A. BMPCS aspires to fulfill its mission as a fully implemented public Montessori school.***

As a Montessori school, we are different from conventional schools. Our first commitment is to the multi-dimensional development of your child. Your child will learn a lot of information during his/her time with us. S/he will also practice skills of concentration, self-regulation, persistence, respect, and empathy. This work is built into the Montessori prepared environment.

Children are given choices and a great deal of freedom—within limits—during the school day. The choices they make, and the accompanying responsibilities, help shape their emerging character. By choosing their own work, shaping it to a considerable degree, and following that work through to completion while working independently or in cooperation with others, the Montessori child identifies her/his interests and develops her/his individual gifts.

Significant emphasis is placed on community service. Younger children learn by serving their small community, e.g., classmates, classroom, and family. As they grow, children reach out to the larger community and experience the many rewards of helping others. The children gain awareness and appreciation of others, the challenges faced by others, and their own strengths and abilities to affect the world around them. We treat each child with respect and expect that they will treat all others in the same manner. We treat each child as an individual and strive to develop each child's unique gifts. With freedom comes responsibility, and children learn to balance their personal freedom with a clear sense of responsibility to themselves, to others, and to the community as a whole.

### **Q. What can I expect in terms of communication from the School?**

***A. We aim to maintain open, honest, timely, and respectful communication with you about your child and information affecting the community.***

There are two regularly scheduled family-teacher (or in the case of older students, family-teacher-student) conferences each year, and families receive four narrative progress reports.

Families also receive weekly updates on their child's activities in the classroom via Transparent Classroom, an online record-keeping platform designed for Montessori classrooms. In the event of special concerns, your child's teacher will contact you to discuss these concerns by phone, by email, or in person. In addition, classroom teachers will communicate with you via blogs, emails, and in-person conversations as needed for individual children.

Each BMPCS teacher is a well-trained professional, and his or her evaluation is confidential and based on direct observation of your child. Teachers will always offer their current best understanding of your child's progress, strengths, and needs, which may be augmented by input from the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and/or auxiliary staff. In addition to work sampling and observation, BMPCS adheres to Washington, DC standards related to assessment and standardized testing. We report the results of these assessments annually.

In order to further develop open channels of communication between home and school, teachers conduct home visits with new students every school year. These home visits offer the teacher a valuable opportunity to learn more about the student, such as his/her interests and daily routines. These insights help shape the teacher's work with each student and build strong bonds between family members and classroom teams.

Family members are likewise invited to observe their child's classroom at least twice each year (once in the fall and once in the spring) in order to deepen their knowledge of classroom life.

Regarding ongoing School-wide communication, BMPCS distributes regular e-newsletters, a Family Handbook, a school calendar, and other occasional letters and publications.

**Q. What can I expect of the environment?**

***A. We strive to ensure an environment that is physically and emotionally safe and supportive as well as aesthetically beautiful.***

Dr. Montessori said that the classroom teacher's first responsibility is to prepare the environment. The learning materials should correspond to the developmental characteristics of the child at each level, and those materials must be attractive to the child: correct in size, aesthetically pleasing, well maintained, and complete. More broadly, the whole environment must appeal to children and inspire their work.

Our community of children and adults comprises a social environment and culture that greatly influences your child's experience. We strive to make this environment emotionally supportive and safe for every child. This does not mean that there are no problems. It does mean that we will work with your child in developmentally appropriate ways to deal with problems as they arise, empowering students with social skills and aiding them in the development of emotional

intelligence.

**Q. What professional standards can I expect of the School and faculty?**

***A. BMPCS aspires to maintain the highest pedagogical standards of Montessori practice.***

At a minimum, all lead teachers hold a bachelor's degree; a number have earned master's degrees as well. In addition, primary and elementary teachers have a post-graduate diploma from a Montessori training center. Our teachers have a sense of mission in working with children and demonstrate high standards for themselves and their students. The School promotes a culture of professional growth in a number of ways. Teachers work with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to create a professional growth plan driven by goals for professional development. Montessori school consultants observe each teacher and work with the School to maintain the highest standards of Montessori pedagogy. In addition, the School annually hosts workshops and conferences for professional development of faculty, administration, and board members.

**Q. What can I expect of the School administration?**

***A. Integrity: a focus on the needs of the individual child in harmony with the life of the community, mission-driven decisions, good stewardship, responsible management, and an open door to your questions or concerns.***

Administrative team members interface with all the constituencies of the School: students, parents/guardians, extended family, faculty, alumni, prospective parents/guardians, professional visitors, government officials, other schools and educational organizations, and the general public. In your interactions with the administration, you can expect professional, courteous, and business-like conduct, as well as mutually respectful communication. Administrators often face decisions requiring a balance of competing priorities. Sometimes those factors are mutually exclusive; sometimes equally well-intentioned adults see matters differently. In making decisions, the administration will focus on the interest of the individual child in balance with the needs of the School.

**Q. What is the School's most basic expectation of families?**

***A. We expect you to make continuing efforts to understand and embrace the Montessori approach and to work in partnership with the School.***

We find that our most constructive relationships with families begin before admission. BMPCS expects parents and guardians to understand and embrace the mission of the School. To that end, we help parents and guardians learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for family education as part of the admission process—so that parents and guardians can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children—and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family's years at the School. Once

children are enrolled, the School expects parents and guardians to attend family-teacher conferences and family education events, participate in home visits and classroom observations, and familiarize themselves with BMPCS philosophy, policies, and procedures.

**Q. What contribution can I make to create a positive School community?**

***A. You can demonstrate respect for all adults and children, the School, and the School's programs.***

Be a role model for your children. Show respect for them, their classmates, family members of classmates, teachers, and other School staff. Respect begins with civility and deepens into trust. Our most fundamental behavioral guidelines for the children are: “respect yourself, respect others, and respect the environment.” We expect the same from adults, family members, and staff. This includes speech and outward behavior. Support your child by speaking of his/her teachers, classmates, and School in positive terms. Respect and abide by the School’s policies and procedures. Honor your commitments. Look for ways to make a positive contribution to the life of the School. Through your behavior, you contribute to your child’s moral development and to the culture and climate of their School, which they experience on a daily basis.

**Q. How can I create consistency between home and School?**

***A. You can strive to parent according to Montessori principles.***

Learn as much as you can about Montessori principles as they apply to the preparation of your child’s home environment as well as the way you interact with your children. This begins with the general principle: “Never do something for your children that they can do for themselves.” Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that she/he can do at each stage of development.

**Q. What are my responsibilities regarding communication between home and School?**

***A. We expect you to maintain an active, direct, and respectful two-way communication with the School.***

Please read communications that are sent home. These may include flyers, newsletters, text messages, and calendars. Please actively participate in home visits, family-teacher conferences, and classroom observations. Inform the School in a timely fashion of pertinent changes in your child’s life. Active communication involves family members sharing observations and concerns about their child with the child’s teacher. In matters large and small, remember the principle of respect: even when there is disagreement, disagree respectfully.



## WHY MONTESSORI?

### **Social Reform in Action**

In the early 1900's, Dr. Maria Montessori, one of Italy's first female physicians, was invited to develop a child care program as part of an urban renewal project in the San Lorenzo district of Rome. The program, located on the first floor of a low-income housing project, became known as the *Casa dei Bambini* or "Children's House." Within months, news of the success of the *Casa* spread, first throughout Italy and later across the globe.

Over the next fifty years, her "experiment," as she called it, evolved into a carefully organized, evidence-based approach to providing children at all developmental levels the opportunity to construct themselves. Based on observation of children, Dr. Montessori concluded that learning should be active and driven by interest. Learning should also occur in mixed-age classrooms where children at various stages of development can learn from and with one another. Her advice was always to "follow the child."

From the beginning, however, Dr. Montessori's revolutionary vision of optimal education was deeply linked to an equally powerful vision of social reform driven by the potential inherent in children. By following the children, attending to their needs, respecting their interests, and guiding (not dictating) growth, we come to see the possibilities of a better world.

It is this spirit of hope and possibility that animates the work of BMPCS and is exemplified in our integration of child and family development.

### **The Method**

The Montessori method is built on the conviction that children are intelligent, active, and purposeful beings who are deeply invested in their own formation. It is distinguished by three interconnected characteristics.

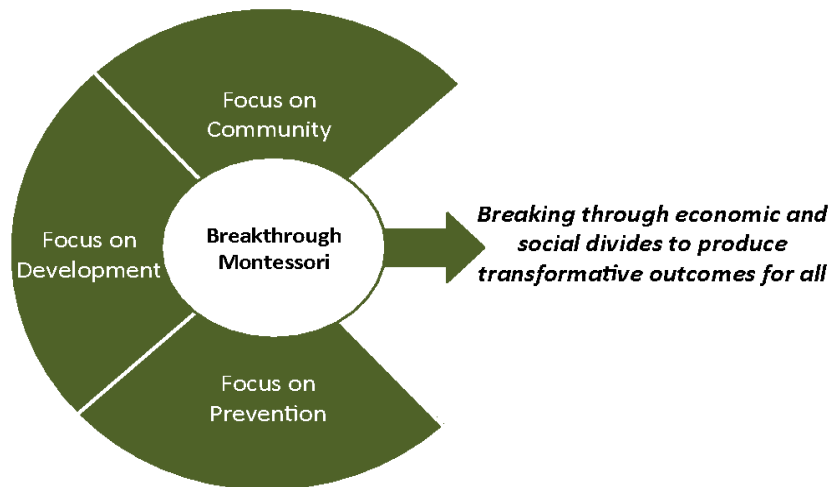
1. The main task of the teacher is to foster the child's development rather than transmit knowledge. Montessori educators are specially trained to observe children. They use these skills to monitor student progress, diagnose needed interventions, and plan future work.
2. The classroom is a rich, specially prepared, and developmentally appropriate environment that invites the child to active, purposeful engagement with learning.
3. Finally, an abiding ethic of care flows from the first two. Within the prepared environment, children develop at their own pace, and teachers guide that development with quiet respect for the needs of the children and their emerging capacities as learners.

The method is a response to a universal plea among children: "I want to learn, but help me to do it myself." Through carefully orchestrated experiences guided by physical and mental

order, children acquire the inner discipline necessary to persist at their chosen tasks, to interact with the world respectfully, and to participate confidently in an increasingly complex world.

### **The Breakthrough Montessori Model**

The mission of Breakthrough Montessori is to enable students to develop within themselves the power to shape their lives and the world around them. To achieve this mission, our model places students at the center and revolves around anticipating and responding to the needs of learners at every stage of development.



Our focus on early support and intervention enables us to address learning challenges before they become disabilities, and our intensive approach to engaging families, along with the wider community, situates our School at the center of a robust network of support, connection, and lifelong learning.

Maria Montessori’s vision animates all aspects of our program. From our intensive approach to engaging families, to the beautiful, developmentally appropriate environment that we create and maintain for all members of the community, we view education as an “aid to life” for learners of every age.

### **Equity at Breakthrough: Our Statement of Values**

*“The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind.” – Maria Montessori*

At Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School, we believe in the unbounded potential of all children. Students of all races, classes, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, and backgrounds deserve a personalized education that enables them to shape their world and the world around them.

- **We support all children.** We believe every child is capable of self-construction and deserving of profound respect.
- **We support all families.** We serve not just the whole child, but the whole family. We welcome all families and partner with them to create a robust network of support. We listen to -- and honor -- each person's narrative. We respect difference of beliefs, and require behavior that protects all children and families.
- **We strive for equity.** We seek to provide public Montessori education to a greater number of families, and we actively work to close the opportunity gap. In our pursuit of equity, we strive to meet the needs of children and families by challenging systemic oppression and marginalization.
- **We believe in education for peace.** Our vision of education is deeply linked to a vision of social reform driven by the power inherent in children. We teach all children to embrace their identity while celebrating and respecting the identities of others. By following children, attending to their needs, respecting their interests, and guiding their growth, we come to see the possibilities of a better world.

## FURTHER READING

To learn more about Montessori education, we suggest the following:

### **Books by Maria Montessori**

Most books available by Dr. Montessori are actually transcribed lectures from her many training courses. *The Montessori Method* and *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* were prepared especially for readers interested in learning about her pedagogical approach. Most titles are available through commercial booksellers; others can be obtained through the North American Montessori Teachers Association.

- *The Absorbent Mind*
- *The Secret of Childhood*
- *The Discovery of the Child*
- *Education and Peace*
- *Education for a New World*
- *To Educate the Human Potential*
- *From Childhood to Adolescence*

### **Books Related to the Montessori Experience**

- Michael Duffy, *Math Works: Montessori Math and the Developing Brain*
- David Kahn (Ed.), *Montessori Talks to Parents*
- Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*
- Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori Today: A Comprehensive Approach to Education from Birth to Adulthood*
- Lynn Jessen and Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori from the Start: The Child at Home from Birth to Age Three*
- Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*
- Aline Wolf, *Peaceful Children, Peaceful World: The Challenge of Maria Montessori*

### **Recommended Books on Childrearing and Family Life**

- Robert Evans, *Family Matters: How Schools Can Cope With the Crisis in Childrearing*
- Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk; Siblings without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too*
- Jane Healy, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect our Children's Minds – And What We Can Do About It*
- Wendy Mogel, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*

- Jane Nelson, *Positive Discipline: The Classic Guide to Helping Children Develop Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation, and Problem Solving Skills*
- Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at any Level*

### **Libros en Español**

por Maria Montessori

- *La mente absorbente*
- *El niño: secreto de la infancia*
- *Formación del hombre*
- *La educación de las potenciales*

Otros autores

- Silvana Montanaro, *Un ser humano: La importancia de los primeros tres años de vida*
- Mario Montessori, *La educación para el desarrollo humano*
- Aline Wolf, *Cómo cultivar el espíritu del niño en un ambiente laico*
- Aline Wolf, *Una guía para padres al aula Montessori*

For these books or for assistance in locating other books in Spanish, contact:  
Rittchell Yau, Consejo Interamericano Montessori 1203 Pacific Drive, Davis, CA 95616 530-758-6340; cite@pacbell.net.

### **Useful Catalogs**

The Michael Olaf Montessori Company publishes beautiful and informative catalogs containing Montessori-compatible books, toys, clothing, and other materials.

- The Joyful Child, for Birth to Three
- Child of the World, for Age 3-12

### **Useful Websites**

- [www.montessori-ami.org](http://www.montessori-ami.org)
- <https://amshq.org/>
- [www.montessoriconnections.com](http://www.montessoriconnections.com)
- [www.montessori.namta.org](http://www.montessori.namta.org)
- [www.public-montessori.org](http://www.public-montessori.org)
- <http://www.michaelolaf.net/>

## **BMPCS GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Mission**

The mission of Breakthrough Montessori is to enable students to develop within themselves the power to shape their lives and the world around them. BMPCS is a racially, ethnically, and economically diverse school community deeply committed to realizing the inherent potential of all children.

### **Leadership and Governance**

The Montessori model recognizes the importance of teamwork, the need for a community of practice, and the value of heterogeneous groupings.

The Executive Director is the outward facing spokesperson and advocate for Breakthrough Montessori. The ED reports to the Board of Trustees and is responsible for fundraising, facility expansion, and liaising with the Public Charter School Board and other authorities.

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction leads the daily implementation of our Montessori program. She supervises and coaches our teaching staff, oversees assessment and evaluation of student progress, manages the school calendar and daily schedule, and preserves the school-wide focus on adherence to the Montessori philosophy.

The Director of Family and Community Engagement interfaces with the family community -- including the School Home Association, facilitates school-home communication, conducts outreach to prospective families, and represents Breakthrough among community partners.

The Director of Operations oversees the School's finances, facilities management, compliance, human resources, and daily operations.

The Director of Student Services works with teachers and families to best serve children who need additional assistance.

The Board of Trustees is a 9-member body that supports the Executive Director in fundraising, facilities acquisition, and representation of Breakthrough Montessori in front of the Public Charter School Board. Two of the board positions are reserved for parents/guardians of current Breakthrough Montessori students.

Together, the leadership team works collaboratively to foster a fiscally healthy, inclusive, joyful school devoted to continuous improvement for all members of the community

### **Coaching Model**

To ensure a culture of continuous improvement and fidelity to Montessori education,

Breakthrough is a coaching school. This means, we have ongoing and embedded coaching and support for our classroom staff that goes beyond the professional development opportunities offered during summer and throughout the school year.

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction is the lead coach for all members of the faculty. She observes each classroom approximately once a week. A follow-up discussion takes place during each teacher's weekly one-hour meeting with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. This time offers the opportunity to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher and the classroom environment, any concerns with specific students, and the best possible practices the teacher can implement in the classroom.

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction provides additional coaching to classroom staff through Lesson Study, a weekly meeting where faculty review Montessori lessons in order to ensure lessons are delivered with a consistent level of quality and accuracy in all classrooms.

The Director of Student Services also participates in this coaching model. Each week, she hosts Child Study, a gathering of all faculty (teachers and classroom assistants) to consider a student's needs in depth and devise a school-wide plan for supporting that student.

The Director of Curriculum and Instruction and the Director of Student Services are furthermore coached by Montessori experts from the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector who visit the school monthly to observe all classrooms as well as the administrative team.

Guides and assistants are also invited to participate in the DC Montessori Teacher Residency, a program, which provides high quality Montessori training, a surround of additional learning experiences, and a professional culture of continuous growth.

*What does our coaching model mean for families?*

Thanks to our coaching model, families can feel confident that our faculty is constantly striving for improvement! It also means family members interact more with our administrative team than they might at a traditional school. Since our Director of Curriculum and Instruction is deeply invested in helping teachers improve their practice, she often joins teachers for meetings with parents/guardians or provides additional insight to family members who have questions about their child's progress at school. Rest assured that involvement by the Director of Curriculum and Instruction does not indicate a certain level of severity. Rather, her involvement is driven by the School's commitment to helping all staff reach their fullest potential as educators.

### **Equity at Breakthrough**

At Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School, we believe in the unbounded potential of

all children. Students of all races, classes, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, and backgrounds deserve a personalized education that enables them to shape their world and the world around them.

- We support all children. We believe every child is capable of self-construction and deserving of profound respect.
- We support all families. We serve not just the whole child, but the whole family. We welcome all families and partner with them to create a robust network of support. We listen to -- and honor -- each person's narrative. We respect difference of beliefs, but require behavior that protects all children and families.
- We strive for equity. We seek to provide public Montessori education to a greater number of families, and we actively work to close the opportunity gap. In our pursuit of equity, we strive to meet the needs of children and families by challenging systemic oppression and marginalization.
- We believe in education for peace. Our vision of education is deeply linked to a vision of social reform driven by the power inherent in children. We teach all children to embrace their identity while celebrating and respecting the identities of others. By following children, attending to their needs, respecting their interests, and guiding their growth, we come to see the possibilities of a better world.

To make this Statement of Values a reality at Breakthrough, we take a number of concrete steps, and we invite families to join us in this work.

- Monthly focus: each month, classroom teams focus on a specific culture by presenting books, food, art projects, and activities that highlight that culture. If you would like to share a cultural experience with our students, please reach out to your child's teacher.
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee: The DEI Committee is part of the School Home Association, and we invite families and staff members to join. The DEI Committee organizes events that promote the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the school.
- Family-Staff Reading Group: Each month, members of the Breakthrough community – parents, guardians, and staff – gather to broaden our understanding of equity issues by reading an article and discussing its implications for the school's work.
- Breakthrough Equity Working Group: A group of Breakthrough staff meets monthly to plan equity-related events and professional development opportunities for the entire Breakthrough team.
- Equity Study: A protocol that Breakthrough faculty and staff use to identify, analyze, and address issues of equity at the school.
- Professional Development: Each year, our staff deepens their work on equity through professional development on anti-bias/anti-racist education.



## **Admission**

Any student who is of appropriate age and grade level and is a resident of the District of Columbia is eligible for admission to BMPCS through the My School DC Lottery. The only limitation to admission is the number of slots available in a given grade. Within the My School DC Lottery, BMPCS offers preferences to siblings of enrolled students, twins and siblings of admitted students, and children of staff. For the purpose of the lottery, Breakthrough Montessori defines “sibling” as two or more children who share the same enrolling parent/guardian through birth, marriage, adoption, or legal guardianship. Mid-year spaces may be filled through the My School DC Lottery waitlist, if applicable, or through open enrollment. Prospective students are admitted without regard to aptitude, achievement, ethnicity, nationality, gender, disability, language proficiency, sexual orientation, or any other basis prohibited by law.

Admitted families wishing to enroll their children in BMPCS must complete an enrollment packet that includes the BMPCS enrollment application, My School DC enrollment form, proof of residency, a home language survey, a copy of the child’s birth certificate, and a copy of the enrolling parent/guardian’s state-issued ID. In addition, prior to the first day of school, enrolled families must submit a DC universal health certificate, oral health assessment form, Authorization for Emergency Medical Treatment, Medication Authorization Form (if applicable) release of records (if applicable), special education status (if applicable), and 504 service agreement (if applicable).

## **Tentative Calendar (please refer to the calendar on the homepage of our website for official dates)**

### *Key Dates*

- August 30: First Day (1<sup>st</sup> grade & kindergarten)
- September 6: First Day (4 year-olds)
- September 12-20: Phase-in Period (3 year-olds). 2-3 new children are introduced to the classroom on each of the following days: September 12, September 14, September 18, and September 20.
- June 20: Last Day for all children

### *No School*

- September 3: Labor Day
- October 8: Indigenous People’s Day
- November 12: Observation of Veteran’s Day
- November 19-20: family/teacher conferences
- November 21-23: Thanksgiving break
- December 18: half day for holiday performances (dismissal at 11:30 AM)

- December 19-January 2: winter break
- January 21: MLK Jr. Day
- February 18: President's Day
- March 22: Professional development
- April 11-12: family/teacher conferences
- April 15-19: Spring Break
- May 27: Memorial Day
- June 20: half day (dismissal at 11:30 AM)

### School Day Schedule

7:30 – 8:30 am	Before care and breakfast
8:30 – 11:30 am	Morning work period (integrated, hands-on experiences in language, math, geography, arts, music, and practical life)
11:30 – 1:30 pm	Outside time and lunch in classroom
1:30 – 3:30 pm	Afternoon work period and napping for younger children <i>On Mondays, students who are not napping have “specials” (enrichment classes) in lieu of the afternoon work period.</i>
3:30 pm	Transition to extended day activities or dismissal
3:30-6:00 pm	Extended day activities
6:00 pm	Evening pick-up

### Arrival & Dismissal Schedule

Arrival	7:30 – 8:30 am
Car-line drop-off	8:00 – 8:20 am
Lobby drop-off (parents/guardians accompany children to the front lobby and sign in)	8:21 –8:30 am
Late arrivals (please check in at the front desk)	8:31 am
Mid-day dismissal for PK3 students	11:30 am
Afternoon dismissal	3:30 pm
Evening dismissal	3:30 to 6:00 pm

### Arrival Procedures

*7:30 – 8:30 am: Before Care & Community Breakfast*

Students are welcome to join us for before care and breakfast, and may arrive anytime between 7:30 and 8:30 am.

*8:00 – 8:20 Car-line Drop-Off*

Students may be dropped off in front of the school between 8:00 am and 8:20 am. We ask parents to assist their children in exiting the car. Members of our staff will greet children at the door of the school.

Please:

- Arrive at school between 8:00 and 8:20 am each day.
- Drive slowly into the drop-off lane next to the curb.
- Come to a complete stop in front of the school doors. For safety, we ask your child's car seat be placed on the right side of the car, so that BMPCS staff may assist your child in exiting the car and entering the building.
- Again, for safety purposes, please do not park in the drop-off lane, or walk your child inside during this drop-off window. Please note that cars that are parked in the drop-off lane without a driver present are subject to ticketing by DC Parking Enforcement.

#### *8:21-8:30 Lobby Drop-Off*

After 8:20 please park your car in a legal parking spot and accompany your child to the front lobby of the school. There, you can sign your child in at the front desk, and your child can proceed to his/her classroom.

#### *Late Arrivals*

If you arrive after 8:30, please come to the front desk, where a staff member will escort your child to the classroom. In the event of an emergency, kindly call the school office.

#### *Transitioning from Home to School*

The process of arriving at school and beginning the school day is an important one for both you and your child. Parent-child separation can be difficult, especially at the beginning, and we are here to assist in that process. We have found the process to run most smoothly when drop-off is swift, confident, and focused on school. Dolls, stuffed animals, pacifiers, trucks, and trains actually delay this process. You can help your child separate, and avoid a struggle during arrival, by leaving favorite items at home, by refraining from giving children food during the process, and by reassuring your child that you trust they will have a good day and you look forward to seeing them later.

#### **Dismissal Procedures**

##### *Half-Day Dismissal (11:30 am)*

- Please park in a legal parking spot and come into the lobby.
- Sign your child out at the front desk.
- Wait in the lobby for your child to come out from his/her classroom.

### *Regular dismissal (3:30 pm)*

As with morning drop-off, faculty will escort children to the car. Please:

- Enter the pull-through lane next to the curb and line-up behind the other cars waiting to pick up children.
- Pull up as far forward as possible to allow the maximum number of cars. This will speed up the line for everyone.

### *Extended Day Program (3:30 – 6:00 pm)*

BMPCS offers an extended day program. Students may be picked up from extended day activities by parents and guardians. Please sign your child out at the front desk, walk to their extended day room, and wait at the doorway for your child to come to you.

### *Pick-Up and Naptime*

Naptime (between 1:30 pm and 3:15 pm) is a quiet time at Breakthrough, and interrupting the sleep schedule by waking children to leave can produce significant disruption for all the children in the napping group. For this reason, we ask that you refrain from picking up your child during naptime unless it is an emergency.

### *Late Pick-Up*

BMPCS closes daily at 6:00 pm. While we understand challenges related to traffic and schedules, we urge you to make on-time arrival a priority. Late pick-ups place a strain on your child who is eagerly awaiting a reunion with you, and on our staff, whose day is scheduled to end at 6:00 pm.

### *Out-of-the-Ordinary Departure Plans*

Please send in a note for out-of-the-ordinary departure plans. As the School is responsible for your child during school hours, we must have written permission from you before we can release your child to another person.

### *Separation and Reunion*

As a family-centered community, the importance of drop-off and pick up extends beyond getting your child in and out of the building. The processes of separating in the morning and reconnecting in the afternoon are crucial to your child's sense of security. A peaceful arrival sets a positive tone for the day. Likewise, a successful reunion increases the odds that your evening family routine will run smoothly. To make the transition process run as smoothly as possible we suggest the following:

- Prepare your child for morning drop-off by situating the car seat on the curb-side of the car.
- As soon as they are able, encourage independence by allowing children to unbuckle

and exit the car with the help of a staff member.

- Reassure your child that you will see each other later in the day.
- Refrain from talking on a cell phone at all times while on school property, especially during drop-off and pick-up.
- When re-uniting, make eye contact, say you are happy to see your child and are looking forward to a pleasant afternoon/evening.
- The teacher's focus during arrival and departure is on assisting the child (and you) and making the transition to and from school. If you have questions about the child's day or wish to have a conversation with a teacher, please contact the teacher directly to make an appointment.

#### *Authorized Student Release*

BMPCS will only release a child to:

- The enrolling parent(s) or guardians.
- Individuals authorized by parent(s) or guardians on the enrollment form.
- Persons listed as a child's emergency contact when a parent/guardian does not arrive by BMPCS closing time (6:00 pm).

For all other instances, please contact your child's teacher and Jasmine Jones ([jasmine.jones@breakthroughmontessori.org](mailto:jasmine.jones@breakthroughmontessori.org)). We will ask for identification from any individual you have authorized to pick up your child.

#### *Unexpected Early Pick-up*

Please go to the front desk and check your child out.

#### *Change in Pick-up Plans*

If a parent/guardian calls BMPCS with a change in pick-up (due to traffic delays or other circumstances), the message will be referred to the child's classroom. In the interest of timely communication, please call BMPCS before 5:45 pm if possible. Anyone designated to pick-up a child needs to be at least sixteen years of age. For the safety and security of your child, we will request identification of persons unfamiliar to the staff. Please inform persons on your emergency pick-up form that they will be asked for identification.

#### **Attendance**

Children who benefit most from the prepared environment are those who come to school regularly. A consistent routine provides security for children, and a sense of security enables children to learn more readily. Because experiences in the classroom and with the materials are cumulative, consistent attendance is necessary for your child to take full advantage of all the environment has to offer.

Likewise, your own commitment to your child's presence in school affirms the importance of school and learning, and demonstrates trust in the environment for your child, which aids in healthy separation and happiness at school. Please make every effort to ensure your child's regular attendance. We specifically request that you:

- Schedule family vacations and trips to coincide with school holidays.
- Schedule appointments with the doctor, dentist, orthodontist, or other professionals outside of classroom hours.

According to the Public Charter School Board and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), a student who is absent for one day without a valid excuse is considered truant. A student who is absent from school without a valid excuse for 10 or more days within a single school year is considered a chronic truant.

Breakthrough Montessori upholds the following Attendance Policy:

#### *Absences*

1. Students must be in school for 80% of the school day (defined as 6 hours between 8:30 am and 3:30 pm) in order to be considered "present."
2. An excused absence requires parental approval and proper notification. Excused absences include:
  - a. Illness (a doctor's note is required if the student is absent for more than five days)
  - b. Doctor or dentist appointment
  - c. Death in the family
  - d. Observation of a religious holiday
  - e. Court appearance
  - f. Visiting a parent/guardian who is in the military immediately before, after, or during deployment
3. Unexcused absences include:
  - a. Family vacations
  - b. Oversleeping
  - c. Errands
  - d. Social events
  - e. Hosting visitors
  - f. Commute/traffic
4. Proper documentation includes parent notes, doctor's notes, or court documents.
5. Breakthrough Montessori reports all absences as unexcused unless the School receives proper documentation.
6. Parents/guardians of students with 5 or more excused or unexcused absences in one advisory period will be requested to participate in a conference. Please note that the school year is divided into 4 advisory periods.
7. Students ages 5-13 years old with 10 or more unexcused absences may be referred to

Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) for suspected educational neglect.

*Late arrival*

1. For the 2018-19 school year, students are marked tardy if they arrive at 8:35 AM or later (school begins at 8:30 AM).
2. BMPCS reports all tardies as unexcused unless the School receives proper documentation for valid late arrivals.
3. Three unexcused tardies are equivalent to an unexcused absence.

**Guidelines for Appropriate Dress**

BMPCS does not require a uniform. However, we do provide the following guidelines for appropriate dress:

- Please choose clothing that allows freedom of movement, comfort, and maximum independence. Clothing and footwear children can take off and put on independently provide valuable opportunities to practice self-care, which is part of the classroom routine. If a child does not yet know how to tie her/his own shoes, Velcro or slip-on shoes are a good option. Unless a child can fasten accessories themselves, belts, suspenders and the like should be avoided.
- In accordance with Montessori principles of simplicity and beauty, clothing should be free of any designs, characters, decals, themes, or written messages.
- We emphasize care of clothing and use aprons, but spills can happen, so “special” clothing should be avoided.
- If children wear skirts, shorts should be worn underneath in order to avoid inhibited movement.
- Children should dress for the weather and expect to go out every day, except for in inclement weather.
- Slippers are worn in the classroom and should also be free of themes. For children age 6 and under, leather soled, ballet-type slippers are easiest for function. You can see examples at Soft Star Shoes (<http://www.softstarshoes.com/>) or Robeez (<http://www.robeez.com/country.asp>). Ballet shoes or slippers also work well.
- Please clearly label all clothing (jackets, gloves, hats, boots, shirts, pants, socks, undergarments) and personal items with your child’s name using a permanent marker. Children should have a complete change of weather-appropriate clothing at all times, including socks. If your child is developing bathroom independence, several spare sets of clothing including underpants and socks are necessary. Should an item become misplaced, please check the lost and found basket at the front desk.

**Breakthrough’s Two-Campus Arrangement (August 2018 – August 2021)**

For the coming three school years (2018-19, 2019-20, and 2020-21), Breakthrough Montessori

will operate from two campuses: 1244 Taylor St. NW (Petworth) and 6856 Eastern Ave. NW (Takoma). Starting with the 2021-22 school year, the entire school community will be located at 6856 Eastern Ave. NW.

Breakthrough has determined that all grades will be served at both locations. For the 2018-19 school year, we will have two primary classrooms at the Petworth campus and three primary classrooms at the Takoma campus. We will have one elementary classroom at Petworth and two elementary classrooms at Takoma.

Breakthrough will use the following procedure to place incoming students on a campus:

- On March 30th, school staff will contact families matched with Breakthrough in the My School DC lottery via phone and e-mail. At that time, we will record each family's desired campus placement. Families have until 7:00 AM on April 3rd to communicate their desired campus to the school via phone or e-mail.
- We will first place siblings of currently enrolled students at the same campus as their sibling(s).
- After siblings are placed, children with parents with disabilities that affect transportation will be placed according to the family's desired campus.
- Next, children with long commutes from home to school (45 minutes or more in typical morning traffic) will be placed at the family's desired campus.
- After the former placements are finished, if interest in either campus exceeds the number of available seats, families will be randomly selected by Breakthrough staff using a computer program.
- After the initial placements have been made and spots have been accepted or declined, the first child on the waitlist will be offered a spot at the campus where a spot is available.
- PK4, K, and 1st grade waitlist students will be offered a spot at the campus where there is a spot available. Siblings of these students will be placed at the same campus.
- Breakthrough Montessori will notify families of their campus placement as soon as possible in April.

Breakthrough will accept requests for a change in campus placement from enrolled students throughout the spring and summer of 2018. We will prioritize requests from families with one of the preferences noted above (sibling, disability, long commute). Any additional seats available at one campus or the other will be offered to families that requested a change via random lottery. Breakthrough will stop changing campus placements for enrolled students once the school year begins.



## OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

### Overview

Breakthrough Montessori aims to cultivate every child's own natural desire to learn. Grounded in Maria Montessori's theory of human development, our classrooms support each child's development according to their readiness. Each child is free to explore within a specially prepared environment and with the guidance of Montessori-trained teachers. Designed to be beautiful, orderly, and calm, each classroom is a community of peaceful, purposeful, and developmentally appropriate activity.

Mixed age classes provide a real-world experience for the developing child, as peers learn from one another and work together to maintain their community. Within an environment that intentionally balances freedom and responsibility, children learn to recognize the needs of others while also developing life-long skills of persistence, critical thinking, and independence.

Each environment is prepared to meet the needs of children moving through successive phases of development; however several characteristics run through all Montessori classrooms. These are:

- *Large blocks of uninterrupted time for self-directed work.* The morning work period from 8:30 to 11:30 am is especially important. It is critical that your child arrive at school in time to begin this period with the rest of the class. For older children, an afternoon work period is also a feature of the day.
- *The adults' intense focus on the children.* Successful Montessori education is based on detailed and ongoing observation of the children, both individually and as a group. Once the school day begins, teachers are immersed in the work of the classroom, which means they are not able to give attention to parents, guardians, or other visitors. We support this element of the program by limiting interruption during the school day. Teachers are available after school for conferences or telephone conversations.
- *Consistency in routines and order in the physical environment.* Children, especially those between three and five, are sensitive to routines and order, and they respond positively to consistency in their daily lives. An orderly classroom environment (everything has its place and everything is in its place) fosters independence as children are given lessons in caring for their environment and share responsibility for its maintenance. Daily jobs such as helping younger friends put on their coats or setting the table reinforce a predictable pattern of expectations. Because of the presence of routines and order, there is very little adult "correcting" of students' behavior.
- *Meticulous attention to grace and courtesy.* At all times we aspire to model good manners and sociable interactions. You should expect to be greeted with a cheerful

“good morning” or “good afternoon” during arrivals and departures. Mealtimes are opportunities to practice table manners, and lessons in making an introduction, offering refreshments, and solving problems peacefully are a regular part of the curriculum.

## **Primary**

The primary program, also known as the Children’s House, serves children from approximately three to six years of age. The environment is carefully prepared using Montessori principles that allow the children to choose work according to their interests and developmental level. The Montessori teacher initially presents the specially designed Montessori educational materials. Each child works at his/her own pace, repeating activities, making choices, and developing abilities through exploration of his work. Indirect learning occurs as children observe the work of others and, in turn, share what they have learned with their classmates. In this way, children explore concepts of literacy, numeracy, geography, music, art, and care of self and the environment.

### *Transitioning to the Primary Environment*

Separation from parents/caregivers is big work for the very young child. And for parents too! It is not uncommon for children to experience distress at the start. They may cry, cling, or say they don’t want to come to school. To mitigate the stress that can sometimes accompany this transition, we invite students in the first year of primary (age 3) to begin the school year with a half-day dismissal at 11:30 am. This allows the child to acclimate to his/her new environment while they adjust to the change in routine. Teachers work closely with families and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to identify when a child is ready to transition to full day.

## **Elementary**

### *Lower Elementary*

Our lower elementary classrooms will serve children in first, second, and third grades (ages six through nine).

The Montessori elementary curriculum encourages children to explore their world and the interconnectivity of the universe. The curriculum interweaves academic disciplines so students learn to make connections across different fields, including:

- Language arts (phonics, spelling, grammar, sentence analysis, foreign language, creative and expository writing, and literature)
- Mathematics (arithmetic, algebra, and geometry)
- Science (natural sciences, physical sciences, and environmental sciences)
- Social sciences (history, civics, economics, anthropology, sociology, and geography)
- Aesthetic Development (music, drama, and visual arts)

*Upper Elementary (starting in the 2021-22 school year)*

Our upper elementary classrooms will serve students in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades (ages 9-12).

Students continue the elementary curriculum, which focuses on the complexity of the universe and the interdisciplinary nature of human society and civilization. As students transition to abstract thinking, they work less with Montessori materials and begin to demonstrate their learning through projects, research, and performances.

**Extended Day**

Breakthrough offers an early morning program from 7:30 to 8:30 am and an extended day program from 3:30 to 6:00 pm. The extended day program is led by our afternoon classroom assistants who join the students at 11:30 am for recess and stay through the afternoon. Following dismissal at 3:30, the afternoon assistants become extended day teachers and provide enrichment activities in areas such as music, dance, yoga and movement, cooking, environmental education, and creative expression. Children who stay for extended day also spend time outside.

For the 2018-19 school year, the extended day program has the following fee structure:

- Full time (the student participates in extended day Monday-Friday): \$14/day
- Part time (the student participates certain days of the week): \$17/day
- Occasional (the family informs the school 24 hours earlier that the child will participate in extended day the following day): \$19/day
- Drop in (the child participates in extended day with no advance notice): \$21/day

Please note that families must pick up their children by 6:00 pm. After 6:00 pm, families will be charged \$1/minute (barring emergency circumstances).

**Assessment**

Breakthrough uses a comprehensive assessment protocol, comprised of the following:

Daily & Weekly Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observation and tracking of engagement in the prepared environment for individual children as well as the entire class</li></ul>
Quarterly Progress Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Individual tracking and reporting of the child’s progress in the Montessori Prepared Environment, with a focus on Executive Functioning, Social/Emotional Development and Academic Learning</li></ul>

Annual Assessment of Growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standardized Assessments of Executive Functions, Math Concept Development, and Literacy Development</li> </ul>
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**Student Placement and Transitions**

Continuity is a hallmark of the Montessori experience. Mixed age classrooms allow students to develop stable relationships with adults and peers over a three-year cycle. The stability enables security and growth, as the child’s role within the group evolves over time from being among the youngest to a community elder. Mixed age groupings also honor the unique pace at which each child develops, a process that does not always correspond to chronological age.

Because we appreciate the importance of continuity and consistency in healthy human development, we take special care in supporting children as they move through several key transitions during their time at BMPCS. Transitions are always monitored by BMPCS staff in consultation with you.

*Entering BMPCS – The Primary Program*

The first transition takes place when children home to become members of their first classroom. We assist families in establishing a trusting relationship with our teachers. Independent care of self (toileting, dressing, feeding) are signs of readiness for the Primary program.

To gain a better understanding of the child at 3 or 4, we also look for signs of emerging independence and sense of order. We see developing independence at work as the child becomes more comfortable in separating from you. Once they are in the classroom, we see it in their ability to choose work in the classroom. Order is seen in the child’s handling of classroom materials. You may notice these changes too.

To support a seamless transition, we invite all students in the first year of primary (age 3) to begin the school year with a half-day dismissal at 11:30 am while they adjust to the change in routine and environment. Teachers work closely with families and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction to identify when a child is ready to transition to full day.

*Extended-Day/Afternoon Work*

Midway through a child’s time in primary, we anticipate a transition to the afternoon program. This usually occurs between the ages of 4.5 and 5, when children have given up their afternoon nap. To be ready for afternoon work, a child must have the stamina and maturity to work comfortably through a full school day. They must be able to take oral direction and regulate behavior in order to work harmoniously in a group.

Many children benefit from spending an additional year in primary to gain greater social-emotional maturity and to hone academic skills. This “gift of the fourth year” provides a student the opportunity to truly assume a leadership role prior to entering the more complicated elementary environment. Because there is overlap between the materials and lessons in the primary and elementary classrooms, students who elect to spend additional time in the primary classroom continue to progress at their own pace. When a student is considered a good candidate for a fourth primary year, families are consulted by December of the third year, and the decision is made collaboratively between the teacher, the family, and the BMPCS leadership team.

Parents/guardians should be aware that placement and transition to a new division of the program at BMPCS might not precisely replicate a graded program in traditional education.

## COMMUNITY, RESPECT, AND DISCIPLINE

### General Expectations

Breakthrough Montessori is a peaceful community of families, students, and teachers. As adults in the community, we aspire at all times to model grace, courtesy, and a deep respect for our community. These values are visible in small and large ways: from cheerful morning greetings and handshakes to the care with which physical spaces are maintained to the manner in which older students assume responsibility for themselves and leadership for their younger peers.

Within this frame, discipline is highly valued as the skill of self-regulation. Maria Montessori distinguished between the “spontaneous discipline” typical of happily engaged children and adult-centered strategies for maintaining “control.” The ability to master oneself is a foundational skill for all subsequent learning. While this is a central goal of all our programs, it is in the primary program where developing the capacity to attain and sustain deep concentration is a focus.

Adults set limits through example. We try always to direct with positive rather than negative guidance. At no time may physical punishment such as spanking a child take place on BMPCS grounds. At all times patience, restraint, and respect for the child’s needs for sensitive intervention govern adult interaction with children.

When students have difficulty with their responsibilities, a series of actions may be taken depending on the significance of an inappropriate behavior. Each student incident is treated individually, but the following staff responses may occur:

#### *Less Serious*

- Student redirected by teacher
- Problem discussed with student
- Other ways of handling a situation brainstormed
- Short time out within the classroom
- Assigned seating near the teacher for a period of time
- Work plans
- Logical consequences
- Parent/guardian note or phone call

#### *More Serious*

- Removal from the classroom for a period of time
- Outside assistance from school personnel (such as the Director of Curriculum and

Instruction)

- Family conference
- Development of an action plan for student, parents/guardians, and teacher

### **Unacceptable Behaviors**

Experimental behavior is a predictable feature of all developmental levels, and we strive to regard such behaviors as indicative of a child's needs. However, because the community lies at the center of our approach to learning, any individual action that negatively affects the welfare of the community is considered unacceptable. As a result, BMPCS cannot allow the following:

- Language that expresses disrespect for another person
- Violent behavior, e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, throwing objects at a person
- Causing, attempting or threatening bodily injury or emotional distress
  - "Bodily injury" means a cut, abrasion, bruise, burn or disfigurement; physical pain; illness; impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ, or mental faculty; or any other injury to the body, no matter how temporary.
  - "Emotional distress" means mental suffering or distress that requires more than trivial treatment or counseling.
- Vandalism
- Inappropriate touching

### **Resolution Process for Unacceptable Behavior**

The first instance of unacceptable behavior will be addressed by the witnessing staff member. The staff member will first stop the behavior. Then, depending on the child's age, they will discuss with the child privately why the behavior is inappropriate and suggest strategies for preventing its recurrence. Parents/guardians will be notified of both the behavior and its resolution.

The second occurrence will be addressed by the witnessing adult and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and will result in the development of an action plan. All action plans are developed in consultation with the family and include concrete goals for resolving negative behavior.

Though we are confident that well-articulated and faithfully implemented action plans will enable the child to address difficulties, in rare instances efforts to correct the behavior fail. In those instances appropriate disciplinary action up to and including suspension or expulsion will be considered. Out of school suspension/expulsion is only permitted to ensure safety and in response to the most serious offenses, such as serious acts of violence or possession of a firearm. In the unlikely event that a child is suspended, the School will work with the family to ensure that the student continues his/her studies and receives all assignments during the

suspension; can communicate with School staff about the assignments; and has the opportunity to make up any work missed during the suspension if he/she cannot complete it during the suspension. As per DC regulations, BMPCS will not suspend any student for more than five consecutive school days or more than 20 cumulative school days in the year.

All disciplinary action taken at BMPCS must be individualized, fair, equitable, developmentally appropriate, proportional to the severity of the behavior and restorative.

#### *Students with Disabilities and Manifestation Determination Meetings*

BMPCS will hold a Manifestation Determination Meeting any time a student is being removed from his or her placement for more than ten (10) school days in one school year.

During this review, a representative of BMPCS, the holder of the student's educational rights, the IEP team, and a staff member who can adequately define the student's disability will be present. All parties will review all relevant information in the student's file and all relevant details of the behavior.

The Manifestation Determination team will discuss the link between the student's behavior and disability. If the team finds that there is no direct link between the student's behavior and disability, and the IEP was being implemented with fidelity leading up to and during the behavioral infraction, the infraction is then considered *not* a manifestation of the student's disability, and BMPCS can move forward with processing the suspension, ensuring the student receives access to adequate educational supports during the suspension. If the team finds that there is a direct link between the behavior and the disability, or the IEP was not being implemented with fidelity leading up to or during the behavior, the behavioral infraction is considered a manifestation of the student's disability, and the student will return to his or her current educational placement. BMPCS will schedule an IEP review meeting to update the student's IEP to accurately reflect the student's current level of functioning within 30 days.

#### *Due Process and Appeals Procedure for Parents/Guardians*

Due process will be followed for all disciplinary actions. Before imposing a short-term suspension, the Executive Director shall immediately notify the parents/guardians in writing that the student may be suspended from school. This notice will be in their dominant language and will provide a description of the incident(s) for which suspension is proposed. It will inform the parents/guardians of their right to request an immediate informal conference with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction and the Executive Director. The parents/guardians of the student and the student shall have the opportunity to present the student's version of the incident and to ask questions of the complaining witnesses indirectly through the teacher or the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. The decision to impose a short-term suspension may be challenged by the parents/guardians. The Board of Trustees serves as the final appeal for families dissatisfied with a school-level decision.



Before any expulsion, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction will consult with Executive Director and the Board of Trustees and immediately notify the student's parents/guardians in writing, in their dominant language. Long-term suspensions or expulsions will only be imposed after the student has been found guilty at a formal hearing. The hearing shall include the Executive Director, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, staff members involved with the incident, and the student with his/her parents/guardians. The student shall have the right to be represented by counsel, question witnesses, and present evidence.

### **Resolving Complaints**

We encourage family members to contact their child's teacher directly with any questions or concerns about their child's classroom experience. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction also provides a valuable resource to families that seek additional clarification about their child's educational journey. If the family and the school-based leadership need further assistance in resolving an issue, family members may contact the Executive Director and Chairman of the Board of Trustees by writing to [board@breakthroughmontessori.org](mailto:board@breakthroughmontessori.org).

## FAMILIES: A VITAL PARTNERSHIP

Lots of schools talk about the importance of the school-home partnership. At Breakthrough, we take it so seriously that we have made it a pillar of our educational model. We also mean for that partnership to function in a very specific way, with a very specific purpose. The Breakthrough approach to family engagement focuses on our mutual engagement in the process of your child's development.

As you have heard us say time and again, a Montessori education extends well beyond the basics of reading, writing, and math into the social and spiritual aspects of life. We are about human flourishing. We are about inclusiveness, equity, and joy. We want to be a community that is grounded in respect for children, which extends to respect for the entire family and our school community. Achieving these goals means that our work with you is directed, primarily, toward enabling home and school to work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations.

Our primary efforts toward building a robust connection between families and the school revolve around communication. And not just communication from the school to you, though clear, consistent, and responsive outreach is important. We rely on three key strategies to build a strong, purposeful partnership between home and school:

***Invitation:*** We build our most productive relationships with families who understand and embrace the mission of the School. To this end, we invite families learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for family education as part of the admission process—so that parents/guardians can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children—and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family's years at the School.

***Building Trust:*** We understand that appreciating the School's mission—through workshops, websites, and other communication coming from school—is only the first step in coming to trust the School. Trust is grounded in relationship, and we seek to build an authentic relationship with each child and each family through making ourselves available through e-mail, telephone, and face-to-face interaction, listening to your questions and concerns, problem-solving together, and through consistently keeping the focus on your child's wellbeing. We appreciate that you are your child's first and most important teacher, and our work together involves as much curiosity as information on our part.

***Commitment:*** As we build this relationship, over time, and always through the lens of what's best for your child and the children in the School, we will come to deeper and more constructive ways to work in harmony. The Breakthrough professional staff is committed to supporting the development of this relationship, and we invite you to join us in holding

ourselves mutually accountable to those commitments of honesty, transparency, inclusivity, equity, responsiveness, and, most of all, an unwavering belief in the potential of all children.

Families often ask for help in creating consistency between home and School, and much of our communication with you is aimed toward supporting this goal. This begins with the general principle: “Never do something for your child that he/she can do for themselves.” Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that children can do for themselves at each stage of development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which we were parented. In general, Montessori education relies on “showing” rather than “correcting.”

We understand that the school/home partnership is vital to successful Montessori education. It begins with honest, open inquiry and deepens into trust. We invite you to let us know your thoughts, questions, and concerns, as we are committed to working together to serve the child.

#### *School Home Association*

The School Home Association (SHA) is a volunteer group devoted to supporting the Breakthrough pillar of family and community engagement. Composed of parents and/or guardians of current students as well as Breakthrough staff, the SHA undertakes projects designed to promote robust, reciprocal connections between home and school. Feedback from the SHA informs decisions related to family and community engagement, fundraising, and other areas of the School’s life. The SHA also supports the School’s ongoing efforts to provide families with opportunities to learn more about Montessori education and how the Montessori philosophy informs the School’s decisions.

#### **Getting Involved**

BMPCS has a talented family community. We depend on the support of these adult volunteers throughout the year. When you donate your time and talents, you make a valuable contribution to the children of BMPCS, and you get the opportunity to meet other parents and guardians. Adult volunteers help to build community spirit and provide needed (and appreciated!) help to our faculty and staff. You can volunteer during the year in a variety of ways:

- Assist with family education, including planning programs and participating at events
- Assist with fundraising projects
- Participate in beautification projects around the school
- Introduce elements of your cultural heritage or professional expertise to your child’s class. Contact the teacher to discuss your ideas.

We also ask that you participate in as many events as your schedule permits. For details on each event, see the calendar as well as upcoming newsletters.

### *Fundraising*

A long-term financial objective of Breakthrough Montessori is to fully cover basic operating expenses through the annual per pupil allotment budgeted through the DCPCSB. At the same time, BMPCS is a non-profit organization that must rely on fundraising to close the gap between public revenue and the actual cost of a BMPCS education. Money raised through fundraising supports:

- Teacher training and faculty development
- Physical and programmatic enhancements and enrichment
- Capital expenses

### *The Breakthrough Montessori Fund*

Donations to the BMPCS fund support every activity listed above. Breakthrough Montessori Fund contributions are tax-deductible. Gifts may also be eligible for matching funds from employers.

### *Fundraising and Community Events*

In addition to direct gifts, each year BMPCS sponsors events designed to raise both awareness of and support for our programs. If you have an idea for an event, please contact Emily Hedin at [emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org](mailto:emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org).

### **Governance**

Breakthrough Montessori is governed by a Board of Trustees. Our charter mandates that two family members serve on the Board. The first is *ex officio*, the SHA President. The second is selected by the Board based on nominations made by the Executive Director. Both family representatives on the Board have full voting privileges.

### **Communication**

At BMPCS we strive to foster clear and robust communication between home and school. The chart below offers guidance regarding the proper channels to use for gaining information and solving problems.

Concern or Question	First Contact
Child's academic, emotional, and social progress; questions about lessons	Classroom teacher <a href="mailto:FirstName@breakthroughmontessori.org">FirstName@breakthroughmontessori.org</a>
Special needs, individualized educational program (IEP), 504 plans	Allison Jones, Director of Student Services <a href="mailto:allison@breakthroughmontessori.org">allison@breakthroughmontessori.org</a>
Montessori pedagogy, curriculum, assessment; school policies	Hannah Richardson, Director of Curriculum and Instruction <a href="mailto:hannah.richardson@breakthroughmontessori.org">hannah.richardson@breakthroughmontessori.org</a>
Enrollment, community events, school-home communication	Emily Hedin, Director of Community Engagement <a href="mailto:emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org">emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org</a>
School finance, facilities, compliance, human resources, and daily operations	Kamaria Mabry, Director of Operations <a href="mailto:kamaria.mabry@breakthroughmontessori.org">kamaria.mabry@breakthroughmontessori.org</a>
Fundraising, expansion, strategic plans	Executive Director
Notice of absences, late arrival, and early pick-up; authorization for medical treatment in school; allergies and dietary restrictions	Jasmine Jones, Office Manager <a href="mailto:jasmine.jones@breakthroughmontessori.org">jasmine.jones@breakthroughmontessori.org</a>

In addition to the above guidelines for channeling the flow of communication, we call your attention to the following elements of our program designed to enhance the school/home relationship:

#### *Classroom Observation*

There is no better way to gain an understanding of your child's experience here than by observing in the classroom. Knowing what is going on in the classroom provides a common point of reference for you and your child to talk about schoolwork. It also enhances communication with teachers. Beginning in October, our programs are open to anyone interested in observing the Montessori environment. In order to preserve the quiet atmosphere of the classroom, we limit the number of visitors each day. Please schedule your observation with your child's teacher.

#### *Conferences*

You may schedule a conference with your child's teachers at any time by contacting them through the School office, either by note, e-mail, or phone call. Conferences are formally scheduled two times a year, in the late fall and early spring. School is closed to accommodate these events, and parents/guardians arrange individual appointments.

#### *Progress Reports*

All students receive four formal progress reports. You will notice that these documents are

notable for the level of detail they provide; they will tell you not only how your child is doing, but also what your child is doing. Like classroom observation, they provide a concrete point of reference for discussing the nature of your child's work. You will receive a final progress report at the end of the school year.

#### *Family Education Nights*

We offer regular family seminars, or family education nights. These gatherings are usually organized around a Montessori-related topic. They are opportunities to share information about making the most of a Montessori education. These events will be advertised as we develop them; we encourage you to join us.

#### *Home Visits*

BMPCS teachers and assistants will schedule a visit to your home at some point during the academic year (typically in between November and March). The purpose of these home visits is to first strengthen your relationship with your child's teacher and classroom assistant. Open and honest communication between you and your child's classroom team translates into improved outcomes for your child. These home visits also give the teacher a valuable opportunity to learn more about your family and your child: what he/she enjoys doing in the afternoons and evenings, how the family spends time together, what interests the child share with his/her family, etc. A deep understand of a child's home life helps inform the teacher's work in the classroom, and we use this insight into the child's likes, dislikes, and interests to create classroom experiences that inspire engagement and learning.

#### *Notes & Reminders, Updates, and Newsletter*

We distribute a regular electronic newsletter of notes and reminders featuring general information related to School and classroom events.

#### *Website*

The BMPCS website contains the most up-to-date information about the School, including calendar updates. Our web address is: [www.breakthroughmontessori.org](http://www.breakthroughmontessori.org)

#### *Telephone/Fax/E-mail*

The office is open for calls 8:00 am to 6:00 pm each day. Please call BMPCS's general number, (202) 407-7022 during these hours. Teachers are not available for calls during School hours, but they will return calls as soon as possible after 3:45 pm.

BMPCS relies regularly on e-mail as a tool for sharing important information. We publish e-mail addresses in our school directory and broadcast information using a distribution list. We ask that all BMPCS families respect the privacy of individual members of the community and only use e-mail information for school-related purposes.

### *Text Messages*

BMPCS uses a text message system called Remind ([www.remind.com](http://www.remind.com)) to alert families to school delays and closings, as well as remind families about upcoming events or important dates.

### *Transparent Classroom*

Transparent Classroom is an online record-keeping platform designed by Montessorians for Montessori schools. It allows teachers to record lessons, make notes, and track progress for each student. It also allows families to get a taste of classroom life through photos and descriptions. Transparent Classroom is available to guides, assistants, administrative team members, parents, and family members. To set up your Transparent Classroom account, follow these steps:

- Watch for an e-mail from Transparent Classroom with subject line “Invitation Instructions.” You should receive this e-mail shortly after the start of school.
- Follow the link, provide your name and e-mail address, create a password, and select notification preferences.
- View your child’s profile, which includes photos and notes from the teacher.
- View school directory (including families and staff)
- Read your classroom blog by selecting “All Pages” from the homepage and following the link to your child’s classroom blog.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY

### Emergency Records

It is mandatory that all health forms be kept current (required by OSSE). If you take your child to the doctor during the school year, please update immunization record as needed. If your child's health form is not kept current, your child may be denied admission until updated. All health forms must be on file before your child begins school.

Please keep the School informed of any changes in your child's enrollment forms. The School must have accurate phone numbers for home, work, and emergency contacts.

Please note that the safeguard of all student information (health, academic, and otherwise) aligns with FERPA.

### Illness

Be considerate of others in your child's class. Do not send your child to school if they are "coming down with something." Children who are not feeling well are not able to participate in the classroom. Please inform the office that your child will not be attending due to illness.

For many communicable illnesses, we ask that students wait to return to school until they have been clear of symptoms for 24 hours and/or have undergone treatment for 24 hours. We may also ask for a note from either a parent/guardian or a licensed practitioner. Further information for specific communicable illnesses is provided below:

1. Conjunctivitis ("pink eye"): If diagnosed with a viral infection, a student may return to school after any redness and discharge have disappeared. If diagnosed with a bacterial infection, a student may return to school 24 hours after commencing antibiotic treatment if a licensed practitioner provides a note attesting to the diagnosis, the onset of treatment, and that the child is cleared to return to school.
2. Fever, vomiting, and diarrhea: A child may return to school after he/she has been free of all symptoms of illness for 24 hours.
3. Pediculosis (infestation by live head lice): A student may remain in class that day; however, parents or guardians should commence treatment at the conclusion of the school day. A child may return to school upon submitting a parent or guardian note attesting to the fact that he/she is undergoing treatment. A student with only nits (eggs) shall not be excluded from school, however, we will notify the parents or guardians and advise them to monitor for re-infestation.
4. Ringworm: A student may return to school upon submitting a licensed practitioner's note stating that the student is under treatment.
5. Strep throat: A student may return to school 24 hours after beginning antibiotic treatment, provided they are without fever and have a note from a licensed practitioner affirming the start of treatment.



We will inform the school community if we are aware of cases of the following communicable illnesses: hand-foot-and-mouth disease, strep throat, pink eye, and lice. We will inform the school of other health issues as needed.

In case of an absence due to a contagious disease or an illness of more than five days duration, a note from your child's physician is required before your child can be re-admitted to the classroom.

If your child develops a fever while at school or shows other signs of illness, you will be contacted and requested to take them home within an hour. If you cannot be reached, an emergency contact will be called to take your child home.

Please remember that children go outside daily except in inclement weather. If your child is unable to take part in outdoor activities because of illness, please keep them at home for the day since we cannot keep individual children indoors during these activities.

### **Medication**

All medication must be given directly to the school office for proper storage: no medication may be left in lunchboxes or backpacks. Please give medication and forms to the senior staff member present when you arrive. A staff member who is trained to administer medication will administer prescription OR non-prescription medication to a child only if the following criteria are met:

1. An Authorization for Medication Administration form is signed by the parent/guardian with the name and dosage of the medication, steps of administration, and dates and/or times/conditions for administration clearly written on the form (forms can be found in the school office).
2. Prescription medication is clearly labeled by the pharmacy or physician, in the original container, and specifically for your child.
3. Non-prescription medication will only be administered from its original container. If more than one dose is to be administered, a licensed health practitioner must approve the administration and dosage on the medication order form or a physician's prescription slip.

### *Sunscreen*

Please note that sunscreen is considered a medication by the District of Columbia. Please provide an Authorization of Medication Administration form, including a physician's signature, and an unopened bottle of sunscreen labeled with your child's name.

## **Food, Nutrition, and Community**

We place a great deal of emphasis on all aspects of meal preparation and consumption at BMPCS. Children bake, prepare snack, set and clear the meal tables. Community is built around meals, and part of the work of being a family is preparing food. From shopping, cooking, and setting the table to eating and clearing up, families reconnect at the dinner table. Children want and need to be included in the planning, the preparation, and the cleaning up of meals.

### *Breakfast*

Children who participate in the early morning program have breakfast with their classmates.

### *Lunch*

Lunch is an important part of the children's workday. This meal provides an opportunity to socialize and renew energy while practicing grace and courtesy with the other children and staff.

BMPCS offers standard and vegetarian lunches each day. Each month, families will be notified of the availability of lunch, the menu, and the price. Certain dietary restrictions such as dairy-free can be accommodated. Check our website or with the front desk for the availability of different menu options. Some students may be eligible for the free or reduced lunch program. To help us identify all families who qualify, we ask that every family submit a free and reduced meal application during enrollment.

If you choose to send lunch with your child, please note that BMPCS is a nut-free environment, and we therefore request that you do not send any foods containing peanuts or nuts in your child's lunch. This includes all foods prepared with peanut oil as well as peanut butter!

We strive to provide only whole, unprocessed foods. Please do not send pre-packaged foods or microwave meals, such as Lunchables or Chef Boyardee pastas since they often have additives and extra salt. Sandwiches, cheese and crackers, and rolled lunch meat (even cold pizza) are healthy alternatives. Fresh vegetables with a hummus dip are great additions. We recommend that fresh fruit suffice for dessert. Please do not send Trix or Danimals yogurt as they contain extra sugar. We recommend yogurts such as Yobaby instead. Milk and water will be provided, so please do not send other drinks. We will return the uneaten portion of your child's lunch so that you know what they have consumed and can make appropriate adjustments. Please do not bring or send fast food/carry-out lunches for your child.

### *Home Guidelines*

Involve your children in preparing their own lunch. Your child can slice cheese and put crackers into a container, choose and wash vegetables and fruit, and even help make a

sandwich.

Prepare the kitchen/dining room so your child can participate. Your child will want to pour their own milk or water, help with peeling vegetables, set and clear the table. You can make that process safe and fun by providing the proper equipment: a small glass pitcher, safe vegetable peelers, apple corers, egg cutters, scrub brushes, and child-sized mops and brooms.

Establish a daily routine. As much as possible, have breakfast, snack, and dinner at the same time each day. This will allow your child to anticipate and participate in the rhythm of the household. Each afternoon, let your child get ready for the next day by emptying and cleaning the lunchbox (please wipe out lunch boxes daily). Upon returning from school, have a small pitcher of milk or water available on a low shelf in the refrigerator so that your child may prepare their own snack.

### *Snacks*

Daily snacks are nutritionally balanced and often include foods prepared by the children. We ask each family to contribute snacks for their child's class; usually you will be asked to sign up to contribute snack on different days during the course of the school year. If you are unable to participate or have any last minute difficulties, please contact Emily Hedin ([emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org](mailto:emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org)).

### *Getting Snack to the Classroom*

You can leave your box/bag of snacks with a staff member at drop-off or bring it into the front office on Monday morning of the assigned snack week. Thank you for your participation in this important part in the life of your child's class.

### *Celebration Food*

We seek always to promote health and well-being. Please do not send in sweet snacks or junk food (cookies, cupcakes, etc.) for birthdays or other holiday celebrations. Whole grain muffins and pizza bagels are examples of festive and nutritious celebration foods. Please inform your child's teacher of any upcoming events and plan a contribution that will be enjoyable and appropriate for all. Please respect allergies when providing food for celebration. In some cases, they are a matter of life and death.

### *Food Allergies*

Parents/guardians are responsible for providing all food, including lunch and snack, for their child in the case of food allergies. Please consult with your child's teacher to plan special foods on birthdays and holidays.

### **Bathroom Independence**

BMPCS requires families to work with their children toward bathroom independence before

the first day of school. The Montessori primary classroom is focused on helping children achieve independence, and we support children who are still working towards bathroom independence. We ask all families to provide the school with one complete change of clothing (including underwear) for their child. For children who are working towards bathroom independence, we ask that families leave multiple changes of underwear and pants. Please note that Breakthrough Montessori will not change pull-ups or diapers (unless doing so is medically necessary). When a child has an accident, either the teacher or the assistant helps the student change (always with a focus on enabling them to do it themselves). The Director of Curriculum and Instruction is available to share resources and strategies for bathroom training.

### **Car Seat Safety**

BMPCS follows all applicable laws and safety guidelines for child safety seats. Please ensure that your child is in a safety seat upon arrival and departure from BMPCS. District of Columbia law requires children under 8 years of age be properly seated in an installed infant, convertible (toddler) or booster child seat, according to the manufacturer's instructions. Booster seats must be used with both lap and shoulder belts. DC continues to require that all passengers regardless of age wear their seat belts. There are significant penalties and fines for violations. Additional information is available in the school office.

### **Security**

The front door to the school is locked at all times. In order to enter the school, visitors must be buzzed in by the office manager. If your child arrives after 8:30 am, you must sign in with the front office so we can take your child off the "absent" list.

As stated in the Arrival/Dismissal section, BMPCS is authorized to release a child only to those people permitted to pick up your child. If your child is going home with a friend, the School office must have permission in writing from the parent/guardian. Last minute phone calls from a parent/guardian in an emergency are acceptable.

### **Emergency Preparedness**

BMPCS has made extensive preparations for a wide range of emergencies, including on-site emergencies, local emergencies, and alerts issued by the National Homeland Security Office. Here are some guidelines to follow in the event of a crisis or emergency:

- A notice of procedures will be posted on the school's website (and emailed if possible). Follow instructions carefully.
- If feasible, you will be contacted directly by telephone. Remain calm and follow instructions.
- In some emergencies (a fire, for example) the children may be walked to a safe location where you can pick them up. This will be posted on the website, and an attempt will be made to call you.

- If we are required to “shelter in place” at the school, we have provisions and are completely prepared to do so.
- In some cases, FEMA may instruct BMPCS to leave the building or location, or we may be told to allow no one to enter our building. These are stressful situations. Please know that your child’s well being and safety are our top priority and that they will be carefully supervised until you can be reunited.
- It is critical that you keep all records up to date in our office—including cell phone numbers, email, and names of those individuals you allow to pick up your child. Consider carefully your list of those to whom we can release your child in a crisis/emergency. Please email any changes to [emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org](mailto:emily.hedin@breakthroughmontessori.org).
- Respond immediately to any requests for items or information related to our emergency plan.
- Keep the school’s telephone number and website handy at home, work, and in your car.
- The school has a supply of emergency clothing and food for all the children in the school. If your child has dietary restrictions or medication requirements, please supply the school with a 3-day supply of special foods or medications.

BMPCS follows the Emergency Preparedness guidelines outlined on the DC Public Schools web site: [www.dcps.org](http://www.dcps.org).