

THE MONTESSORI SCHOOL OF SAN ANTONIO
REOPENING PLAN
2020-2021



The Montessori School
of San Antonio

HEAD OF SCHOOL

Dear Montessori School of San Antonio Families,

I would like to share some preliminary information with you about the important changes we have made to the upcoming school year. It is an uncomfortable feeling for all of us to be working with so many unknowns and requires enormous flexibility and patience from everyone. Ultimately, we must be prepared to make changes with very short notice. Our plans are designed to be flexible and offer MSSA the ability to respond quickly as state and local public health guidelines change.

The Montessori School of San Antonio is a school that cares deeply about its community. I want to express my deep appreciation for our students, parents, employees, and trustees, and how they approached their work during the most unusual of circumstances these past few months.

Social distancing is a requirement that will be with us for a long time. We have the advantage of a large and well-appointed campus. MSSA has a low student-to-faculty ratio that is highly favorable to students. That means we can deliver our Montessori curriculum, implement social distancing, and keep a daily schedule to which families are accustomed. We are planning to have students arrive at their normal time, attend school, and have after school activities. We will continue to keep classes small to allow students to spread out and maintain appropriate spacing. We have also planned for remote learning when necessary.

We miss our students and look forward to welcoming them back to The Montessori School of San Antonio. Following is a letter by our Program Director, Theresa Powers. We have also provided answers to a series of questions that are relevant to our families at this time. As the year moves forward and circumstances change, we will amend our plans as necessary. These updates will be made available through our weekly newsletter The Dispatch and on our website: <https://www.montessorisa.org/covid-19-information/>

In closing, I want you to know that I am thrilled to be joining The Montessori School of San Antonio community, even during COVID-19. Please remember our plans are a work in progress as guidelines from state officials and health organizations change almost daily. It is difficult to predict how everything will look moving forward, and we thank you for your help in keeping us safe and your patience in this ever-evolving environment.

Sincerely,
Dan Ahlstrom Ed.D.

“Free the child’s potential by giving them the roots of responsibility and the wings of independence.”

- Maria Montessori



PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Dear Families,

I am writing to let you know about program plans that The Montessori School of San Antonio has made for fall. Our plans strive to provide an on-campus experience for our children that eliminates and mitigates health risks as much as possible while COVID-19 is still a threat. We aim to provide the safest possible environment for our children, parents, faculty, and staff while staying true to the Montessori methods that are the foundation of our unique learning environment.

Our administration has worked with faculty and staff to make plans thoughtfully, with an eye to both the broad challenges of planning systems and programs in the midst of uncertain conditions, as well as the detailed logistics of having students on campus in the fall with new health-related procedures and the possibility of moving at any time to a remote learning system.

Please know that MSSA has a plan for remote learning in the case of campus closure. Plans for remote learning are built from lessons learned by our faculty from our remote learning this past spring semester, including feedback from students and parents. Our remote experience, should we implement it, will provide both online and offline learning to our students, as we strive to make the at-home time productive, engaging, and user-friendly for both children and parents. Teachers are working hard to create a remote learning system that will deliver our education program; we are also mindful of the importance of relationships and connections and the social and emotional well-being of our children as we design our remote plans.

Our school has advantages in many areas; our size and outdoor grounds provide the capacity that will allow us to have all children at school daily in ways that schools with smaller campuses and classrooms will not. As well, the Montessori method of learning and practicing procedures will allow many of our new protocols to fit naturally into the school day. We also have a faculty that consistently goes above and beyond for our children and a dedicated administrative team.

I am grateful to the faculty, staff, and administration for their work to rise to the challenges the pandemic has brought; they are working hard this summer to create an environment, whether in-person or remote, that will be a true experience of what our mission calls us to do: provide a Montessori education that will guide our students for life.

Sincerely,
Theresa Powers



QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR PLAN

What's been done so far?

During the week of Teacher In-Service in late May, faculty were charged with meeting in levels to address ways to set classrooms for social distancing, establish routines for cleaning, reconsider material distribution, and many more classroom concerns. They were also charged with considering ways to connect across a variety of relationships in this new environment– as teachers with children and teachers with parents, as well as the challenges posed by children working together in groups. Level representatives shared information and questions from those meetings with administration, and these discussions set the basis for structuring program plans. Administrative teams also met in small and larger groups to address concerns for health, facilities, technology, communication, and operations.

Where is the School getting guidelines?

Plans are formulated with guidance from a variety of national, state, and local sources. We also refer to guidance from the Independent School Association of the Southwest, our accrediting organization, and the Texas Private School Association. The Texas Education Agency delayed the release of their guidance for schools until late July. We continue to consult these organizations as they make updates to their guidance for schools.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>
- Texas Department of State Health Services- <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>
- City of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District- <https://www.sanantonio.gov/HEALTH>
- Texas Education Agency (TEA) - <https://tea.texas.gov/>
- Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS)- <https://www.isasw.org/>
- Texas Private School Association- <https://texasprivateschools.org/covid19/>

Will there be an option for parents to select remote or in-person learning?

In the event that we are required to limit or restrict access to campus for a classroom or level, or if there is a local or state order to close, the School intends to transition to remote learning. Choosing remote learning while the class is on campus is an option we are still exploring.

What are the guiding principles that structure the School's plans?

The School is committed to prioritizing all members of our school community's health and safety as we uphold our mission to guide children to be passionate learners, independent thinkers, and engaged citizens. We want to make the best efforts to adapt to a changing situation while aligning with our Montessori instructional program elements, as we re-envision elements to fit the contours of a fluid and very different kind of school year.



What kinds of program changes will there be?

One of the main changes will be how our classroom groups operate during the day. In past years, students would stay in their mixed-age classroom groups for the bulk of the day and mix with other grade-level students in Specials like Art and Music, as well as in Early Arrival, After School Childcare and After School Activities. Our new schedule will minimize contact with students by keeping students in their classroom “cohort” – and although their cohort will move together during the day or break into small subsets of the classroom, students will not mix with other cohorts. So, a fourth grade student who used to go to music with other fourth graders will instead be in a music class with half of their classroom cohort. Middle School seventh and eighth-grade students are considered a cohort group.

How does having cohorts change things?

The good news is that we have created schedules that allow for cohorts, but do not disrupt the uninterrupted work period, which is a hallmark of Montessori education. However, to allow for cohorts, there are changes to the number of times students meet in Specials weekly. Here is the breakdown for weekly specials by level:

Level	Music	Motor Skills	Art	Spanish	Library
Primary Half Day	2	2			
Primary Full Day	1	2	1	1	1
Lower Elementary*	2	2	1	1	1
Upper Elementary	3	3	1	1	1

*Additionally, Lower Elementary rotates through each of the Specials weekly so that they will have one Special twice a week

Do children move during the day?

Children will mostly spend the day in their assigned class with their assigned teacher. However, they will move daily to Specials, in which case they only travel with students from their cohort. The schedule has been designed to allow for rooms that students will move into to be cleaned.

How does the cohort work in Middle School?

In past years Middle School students traveled to four core academic classes either daily or in blocks three times a week. With the new schedule, Middle School students will focus on two core subjects for two weeks and then rotate the following week to the other two core subjects, which will allow for a deeper dive and focus on concepts and practice, and also translate well should we need to go to remote learning. This new model minimizes movement and contact during the day. Their Specials schedule will remain mostly unchanged.

How will classrooms change?

Teachers are re-arranging their classrooms to allow for social distancing, including moving desks, removing rugs, designating areas on rugs for individual use, designating doors as exit or entrances, marking spots to designate where to stand, and making use of outdoor spaces as class meeting spaces. Students will not face each other at desks. Students will have their own materials like scissors and pencils instead of sharing classroom items. Signage will alert and remind students of procedures throughout the school.



Will you take temperatures?

Yes. Families will learn new procedures for arrival, and teachers will incorporate temperature taking throughout the day for students. Employees and vendors will also have temperature-taking procedures; all procedures will be outlined in detail.

Will you wear masks?

Yes. Masks will be required for everyone on campus with certain exceptions, including recess and physical education. Teachers will work with students to make sure children wear masks. We are investigating and reviewing different types of masks, including masks with transparent areas that allow for viewing facial affect, which is important for teaching and learning.

What about recess?

Schedules have been built to stagger recess times and keep children in their cohorts, and the campus grounds have been separated into zones that children can play in. We are currently looking at options for adding shade structures to areas of campus as we set up these zones. Each classroom will have its own set of playground equipment that will not be shared with other cohorts.

Will there be After School Activities and After School Childcare?

Yes. We are putting together a plan that will essentially combine After School Sports and After School Activities with After School Childcare to keep students in their cohorts. For example, Primary Half Day students from one class who stay for extended care will not mix with Primary Half Day students from another class. We will not bring grade level or mixed groups of classes together for After-school Sports/Activities, such as Lower Elementary Join the Cast or Upper Elementary Soccer Club. Instead, students will have an opportunity to participate in After School Sports and After School Activities in their classroom cohorts. Students who do not report to dismissal will stay in their classrooms. The After School Program Instructor will meet students in their classroom and escort the class to a designated area, for practice or activity, and then return to the classroom following their scheduled time. Childcare will then resume for the remainder of the day. Planning for staffing and operations for this is underway, and details will be released soon.

What about Early Arrival?

Early Arrival will operate in alignment with the cohort model; children will be able to attend at the regular 7:00 AM Early Arrival. More information on this will follow.

Will the school field Competitive Sports Teams?

Not at this time. We are currently waiting on guidelines from the Texas Education Agency and Independent Schools Athletic League.

What about food?

Students will be asked to bring their lunches; lunchboxes are allowed. Primary and Lower Elementary children will need to bring their own individual snacks; we will not have parents sign up or deliver group snacks this year. After School Childcare will provide a snack. Although the school has successfully limited single-use disposable items in recent years, we expect that the use of those items will increase this year; we will make every effort to recycle items. We are working with our hot-lunch provider Café Vida to put together a lunch program that provides individually packaged lunches. Parents will not be allowed to have lunch delivered to children as we minimize contact with adults on campus. If a child forgets lunch, we have a "snack pack" that will be healthy and fortifying that we provide to children.

Do you have plans for remote learning?

A more detailed plan is coming. We are working on plans for remote learning with both online and off-line developmentally appropriate learning activities based upon their age and division. Specials will be incorporated into remote learning. We have adopted a new learning management system called Canvas for both in-person and remote learning in the Middle School. Teachers will be providing resources for remote learning at the beginning of the school year in 'Meet the Teacher' Back to School virtual events.

Will Registration be in person?

Not at this time. Plans are underway to deliver and collect all information online. MSSA has recently contracted with SchoolPass, a digital dismissal and visitor management platform. Detailed information about how we will use SchoolPass and instructions for parents will be delivered soon. Also, there will be information sent weekly in *The Dispatch* about all operations, so please be on the lookout for *The Dispatch* emails.

Will parents be able to volunteer and attend events?

Not at this time. As we minimize contact between children, we also want to limit contact with adults, and that includes limiting contacts for our faculty and staff and limiting gatherings. Plans are underway to figure out ways to translate events so that they can keep the spirit of the event but be held virtually, and those plans will be shared as we get closer to each event. Parents of children with diagnosed learning issues who contract with learning specialists will be allowed to continue to have those specialists on campus; there will be a protocol and procedure for those visits.

What about overnight trips?

We are restructuring our Upper Elementary, and Middle School Outdoor Education trips so that the camp instructors will come to our campus to provide their program elements. With this, students will not travel to Mo-Ranch or NCI for overnight stays, but instead have an alternative Outdoor Education Program at school, utilizing our campus grounds and co-led by camp instructors with assistance from our teachers. The Model Montessori United Nations organization, which our eighth graders regularly participate in, has cancelled their Spring conference in New York City. We are reviewing other options for participating in a Model UN conference, including MMUN virtual offerings.

What about cleaning?

Cleaning and sanitizing protocols have been reviewed and will be increased throughout the school based on state and federal guidelines. Our campus will have daily and weekly protocols for both cleaning and sanitizing. Bathrooms and classrooms will have touchless soap dispensers installed, and hand sanitizer will be available; sanitizer use with students will be monitored by teachers. We have hired a day porter to do additional cleaning and sanitizing, and touchpoint cleaning will happen on a daily schedule, including cleaning of playground equipment as needed. Our goal with our children will be to teach, practice, and review all new procedures so that they are incorporated into the school day in a routine fashion, whether the procedures are temperature taking, cleaning, staying apart by six feet, wearing masks, etc.

When will I hear more?

You will receive a Summer Information Email with more information in mid-July, including dates for our online Back to School 'Meet the Teacher' events. Teachers will also contact parents with plans for connecting with students before school begins, including students that are new to MSSA or new to a level.



Additional Questions or Concerns?

Please email: communications@montessorisa.org

ILLNESS & COVID- 19 DIAGNOSIS INFORMATION

If your child has a fever, defined as 100 degrees F or higher, the protocol is they must stay home.

If your child has any combination of the symptoms below, the protocol is they must stay home.

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Chills
- Muscle Pain
- Headache
- Sore Throat
- Loss of taste or smell
- Known contact with COVID-19 illness
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

In the event your child has tested positive or exhibits symptoms for COVID-19, in order to return to school:

- A child must be fever-free for 24 hours without fever reducing medications
- 10 calendar days must have passed since onset of illness
- Symptoms have improved (cough, breathing, etc.)
- One negative COVID-19 test or cleared by a healthcare provider

In the event a child exhibits COVID-19 symptoms while at school:

- The child will be separated from other children
- Families will be notified
- The child must be picked up within an hour
- Children may return to campus once the above criteria for returning to school are met



What if another student or teacher in my child's class tests positive for COVID-19?

If someone has tested positive, communication with families will be sent out as soon as possible, relaying that a student/staff member that was on campus has tested positive. No other identifying information will be given out to protect identity. The Health Department will be contacted, and contact tracing will begin. Deep cleaning and sanitizing will begin immediately. Further information regarding other necessary precautions, which could include quarantining, will be followed as requested by health officials.

BUSINESS OFFICE NOTES

Tuition and related issues:

- Returning enrolled families are responsible for the full year's tuition.
- Newly enrolled families are responsible for the full year's tuition upon enrollment.
- August 1 is the first payment date for all payment plans.
- Tuition will not be discounted in the event of remote learning.

Tuition Protection Plan

MSSA's Tuition Protection Program (TPP) has been expanded to include campus closure as a covered risk. Closure is defined as twenty consecutive school days. A delayed opening that triggers an adjustment to the annual school calendar is not classified as closure. Please refer to your Enrollment Agreement for the definition and application of TPP to the different payment plans. The deadline for purchasing TPP coverage or for making changes to the payment plan is August 1. You may contact the Business Office with any questions regarding your child's enrollment.

Please remember our plans are subject to change based on guidelines from state officials and health organizations.

Additional Questions or Concerns?

Please email: communications@montessorisa.org

