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2023-2024

PARENT/GUARDIAN

HANDBOOK

Mission Statement:

Our school community creates and maintains a learning environment that nurtures the development of the whole child.

Note: This handbook is meant to be used as a guide. If you have extenuating circumstances, please bring those to the/Head of School, who, in conjunction with the Board of Directors, may be able to make rare

exceptions to these policies. The Stepping Stones institutional bylaws require a Full Board vote approval to amend the verbiage (or the intent) in the handbook, once approved.

Table of Contents:

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK	2
ABOUT STEPPING STONES MONTESSORI SCHOOL IN EAST LANSING	3
PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS:	3
History of our school:	3
The Montessori Staff - The Montessori Guide:	3
The Montessori Staff - The Assistant or Intern:	4
The Child's Rights and Responsibilities	4
Discipline in the Montessori Environments:	5
PROGRAMS & HOURS:	6
ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE PROCEDURES:	7
Before Care	7
Curbside Drop-Off: Toddler, Primary and Elementary	8
School Day Departure	8
ITEMS TO BRING TO SCHOOL	9
Toddler	9
Primary and Elementary	9
Rest and Nap Time	9
Special Notes	9
Snack	9
Lunch	10
OUTDOOR TIME:	10
FIELD TRIPS:	11
Forms	11
Walking Trips	11
Bus Trips	11
Private Cars	11
TOILET TRAINING/DIAPERING:	12
Primary	12
BIRTHDAYS:	13
PHOTOGRAPHY OF CHILDREN:	13
II. PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP	13
Volunteer Opportunities	15
In-Lieu of Volunteering Fee Program	15

Parent Education Requirements and Opportunities	15
CLEARANCE AND SUPERVISION OF VOLUNTEERS:	16
FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS:	17
Annual Giving at Stepping Stones Montessori	17
Other Major Fundraising Events:	18
HEALTH AND SAFETY	19
Sickness Procedure	19
Medication Policy	20
Notes on Safety	20
Child Information Card	20
Emergency Response Procedures	20
Bad Weather	20
III. ENROLLMENT AND TUITION	21
Enrollment Policy	21
Tuition Policy	21
Late Fees	21
Other Fees & Charges	22
Inactive Accounts	22
TERMINATION	23
SCHOOL CLOSING	26
TAX INFORMATION	26
LICENSING NOTEBOOK	26

INTRODUCTION TO THE PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK

Welcome to Stepping Stones Montessori School in East Lansing. The aim of this Parent/Guardian Handbook is to provide information concerning our programs as well as our school. We aim to make this handbook as complete as possible. We expect parents to read the information carefully and contact the school if you have any questions or comments.

ABOUT STEPPING STONES MONTESSORI SCHOOL IN EAST LANSING

PHILOSOPHY AND GOALS:

We at Stepping Stones Montessori School in East Lansing, hereafter referred to as Stepping Stones Montessori, believe in providing an environment in which your child has the freedom to grow and learn in many areas: Practical Life Skills, Sensorial, Geography, History, Mathematics, Language, Cultural and Social. This prepared environment is suited to the child's physical, academic, emotional and social needs. We recognize the tremendous capacity and desire of children to discover and explore their environment. We make use of the fact that a child has sensitive periods for certain types of learning; periods which once past will never occur again in the same capacity. We allow children the freedom to learn in a safe and caring environment with direction and encouragement given by a very knowledgeable staff. Like all Montessori programs, the classrooms follow a three-year cycle and thus, classrooms have children aged 18 mo-3 years, 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12 combined in each classroom. To the greatest degree possible, the classes are balanced in terms of age groupings and gender of the children. We are licensed by the State of Michigan's Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Department to care for children ages 16 months to 12 years.

History of our school:

Stepping Stones Montessori was established in 1982 as a non-profit, non-discriminatory Preschool and Kindergarten. It was housed in the Edgewood United Church classrooms. The Elementary Program was established in 1994 for children 6 to 12 years old. In 1998, after extensive fundraising, we built and moved into the building at 1370 Beech Street. The Toddler House, located adjacent to the main school, was opened in the fall of 2004 to accommodate children ages 18 months to 3 years. In the Spring of 2017, Stepping Stones purchased the vacant land behind the school and began to turn it into playing fields and outdoor classroom space.

The Montessori Staff - The Montessori Guide:

The Montessori professional is referred to as a Guide rather than a teacher. Their role in the classroom is to observe and assess the children and guide them to various materials and their use. The children discover concepts through their use of the materials. The Guide prepares and maintains the classroom with the help of the assistants and children. They demonstrate materials and exercises, help the child to find works of interest and provide a model for the child in speech and movement. They may at times appear to be uninvolved with the children, while they are in fact observing where attention might be most needed and the level and type of work that individual children are pursuing with the self-teaching materials. The capacity to observe is one of the first jobs of the Montessori professional. The Montessori Guide allows the child to

follow their own interests and capitalizes on these interests. The Montessori professional does not use rewards, pressure, or punishment to teach a child. Rather, they set up and maintain guidelines to help the children gain an inner discipline. Each primary and elementary classroom is staffed with a Montessori Guide holding a diploma from an American Montessori Society (AMS) or International Montessori (AMI) certified Montessori training center. Elementary Guides have a related Bachelor's Degree.

The Montessori Staff - The Assistant or Intern:

The Montessori Guide demonstrates the initial use of the didactic equipment while the Assistant aides the child in following the ground rules and helps children with work that has been presented to them by the Guide. The Assistant protects the Lead Guide's lessons from interruptions, and steps in as needed to assist children with their activities. They also provide supervision at snack, lunch and on the playground. The Assistant helps to prepare materials for demonstration and may also help with projects, songs, games and stories. The Intern performs the same duties as the Assistant and gradually takes over responsibilities of the Guide. Towards the end of the school year, the Intern may direct the classroom as a required part of the training.

The Child's Rights and Responsibilities

Children are expected to observe the Ground Rules established and discussed with the children early in the year – with reminders as needed. We encourage you to ask your child about these rules and do what you can to reinforce them. Most of the rules are basic to their health and safety and the smooth operation of the classroom, such as walking instead of running or talking quietly rather than shouting. In addition, we adhere to a basic set of rights and responsibilities for the children.

Child's Rights:

Children are free to work with any material displayed.

Children may work on rugs or tables, whichever is suitable to the work chosen.

Children have the freedom to use the room as their need dictates with the above rights.

Children have the right to work undisturbed by others. They may initiate, complete and repeat an exercise alone without a break in concentration.

Children have the right to choose not to join in group activities. They may continue working on individual exercises or may stand apart to

Child's Responsibilities:

Children must use material well without harming it or others. They may not use the materials in a way that disturbs the activities of others.

The child may not work on the shelves, as this may obstruct other children's access to materials.

Children have the responsibility for restoring the room during and after exercises – mopping their own spills, returning rugs and returning work to the appropriate shelf.

Children may not touch the work of another child without an invitation. Children are not allowed to interfere with another child's

observe the group activities without actually participating.

Children have the right to work alone.

Children have the right to do nothing if they desire. They may observe, think quietly or just relax.

learning cycle. If one child leaves their work temporarily, they can continue later, confident that it will be as they left it.

Children are not allowed to interrupt or disrupt group activity that they have chosen not to join.

Children are not forced or even encouraged to share work. Generosity develops from within as a child matures and gains self-security. With adequate materials and group rules, sharing comes naturally.

Idleness is not allowed to disturb or distract others' activities.

Discipline in the Montessori Environments:

The Montessori Philosophy is based upon the principle of self-discipline that comes from within the child. The discipline is a product of the child's interaction with adults, other children and the environment.

Ground Rules are chiefly the means by which self-discipline is obtained. Ground Rules for each classroom are very similar and are presented to the children from the first day of school. These rules and their significance are discussed with the whole group. Sometimes, the children rather than the adults make rules. It is shown that the rules are adhered to for the good of everyone.

Here are some examples of Ground Rules:

- I talk with an inside voice.
- I walk in the classroom and the hallway.
- My work is done at a table or on a rug.
- My materials are always returned to their proper place.
- I may invite another student to work with me or I may say that I want to work alone.
- I respect and treat with care my work, my environment, and my classmates.

Reinforcement of the rules is necessary on an individual basis and with the whole group. This reinforcement is given through discussion or through a form of play-acting called "Grace and Courtesy Lessons".

Stepping Stones Montessori does not use punitive methods of discipline and the children are never embarrassed or ridiculed.

Our staff will use positive methods of discipline that encourage self-control, self-direction, positive self-esteem and cooperation. We also take a proactive approach to discipline, believing that children will behave appropriately, when that behavior is explicitly taught. In a Montessori environment, we teach

through “Grace and Courtesy Lessons.” Acknowledgement of the child’s intentions and feelings is very helpful for the child, and something that we use regularly in addressing behavior. It is also important to provide a statement of logical consequences and to redirect the child towards another activity.

Example: “It looks like you are having fun, but if you throw the blocks they might hit other children and hurt them. Let’s use the blocks on the floor and see what we can build!”

If, after being spoken to, an unacceptable behavior continues, the child will be redirected to another activity. If a child continues to have difficulty in disciplining themselves, we may ask a child to take a moment to reflect and gather their emotions in a space that is safe. This time is intended to allow the child to calm and recenter. This will be used only as a last resort when the child is using aggressive behavior. On occasion, parents will be contacted to arrange a conference to discuss the continued behavior. This will be done as soon as a pattern of behavior is observed.

Our classrooms are set up to allow children choice and ownership. We want students to feel comfortable behaving in the ways they need, in order to be successful. However, when a behavior becomes a pattern that prevents other children from being able to work, or is otherwise inappropriate for the classroom, parents and guides need to work together toward a solution. Parents will be informed of the issue and the strategies we are using at school. The next step, if the problem persists, is for the family to meet with the guide and develop a plan for school and home. As needed, the Head of School may be involved in that conversation. The plan will include ideas for parents, guides and the student to address the behavior(s). The plan may also include observations by the Head of School or other guides to help better understand the student behavior. Every effort will be made to keep a child at the school. However if improvement is not sufficient after a plan has been implemented the school does have the right to terminate enrollment.

It is understood by both the parent(s)/guardian(s) and the school that first and foremost, the school has a responsibility to protect the learning environment for the children to learn and thrive. In order to accomplish this goal and the mission of the school, the school has the right to, and will, take actions to prevent any deterrents. For example, the school may (1) limit the level a student may be involved with the class, (2) limit the level a student may be involved with daily activities (3) limit any family member and/or guardian from school activities if the school determines it necessary, and (4) limit any family members and/or guardian from school premises if necessary.

PROGRAMS & HOURS:

Stepping Stones Montessori welcomes children 18mo – 6th grade. We are open from 7:40am – 5:30pm Monday through Friday throughout the school year with the exception of breaks as listed on the school calendar.

Early Care:

7:40-8:30am

Drop off:

8:20-8:30am

Toddler and Primary Base Program:

8:30am-12:00pm

Toddler and Primary Full Day

8:30am-3:30pm

Elder/Kindergarten Final year of Primary

8:30am-3:30pm

Elementary

8:30am-3:30pm

Aftercare:

3:30-5:30

SCHOOL ATTIRE:

Children should come to school dressed to enjoy all types of activities: floor work, exploration of art media, water activities, gross motor skill activities and outdoor play. Our primary focus is for your child to enjoy themselves while learning in the environment. At times, trying to keep clothes clean gets in the way of the activity. Parents are encouraged to bring a change of clothes when going somewhere directly from school where nice clothes are necessary. We cannot be held responsible for stained or damaged clothing. Please do not send children in attire (shirts, backpacks) with violent images on them, as we promote a peaceful community.

Helpful Hints

- Clothing requiring as little help from adults as possible is less frustrating and most helpful to children.
- Since winter play is wet and at times muddy, you may consider a one-piece snowsuit that can remain at school throughout the week. Snow pants should be worn from the first snowfall through early spring.
- Keep in mind that some children will be removing outdoor shoes three or more times daily and may need assistance. We recommend a low, canvas or leather running shoe or oxford with Velcro, elastic, zipper or tie closings.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE PROCEDURES:

School Day Arrivals

IN ORDER TO RESPECT THE YOUNG CHILD'S GROWTH TOWARD INDEPENDENCE, ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO ENTER THE CLASSROOM ALONE. Say goodbye at the entrance of the school. Staff will make sure your child reaches their classroom.

Before Care

Students that need to arrive before 8:20 am will be included in Before Care. Before Care will start at 7:40am. Before Care students can bring in a breakfast or morning snack in addition to their lunch for the day. We want to avoid students eating their lunch food in the mornings. This is a quiet time when students can choose work, socialize, read and have a peaceful start to their day.

Drop-Off: Toddler, Primary and Elementary

Toddler: Your Lead Guide will be inside the entrance door of the classroom, ready to greet your child. Please tell your child you will return to pick them up, knock on the door, and allow your child to enter the classroom.

Primary: Each morning, Stepping Stones staff will be outside the building ready to welcome your child to school starting at 8:20am. Your child begins their time of independence as they enter the building with confidence.

Elementary: Elementary staff will be at the entrance and on the Elementary Playground. Your child will start their day outside for a few minutes, then enter the building as a group at 8:30.

School Day Departure

Once children have been picked up, they must be supervised by parents at all times and must follow all school policies if they remain on school grounds. We ask that if you have just picked up on the playground that you exit the playground through the school with your child. We encourage community conversations to happen at the entrance of the school as needed at pickup and drop-off.

It is the responsibility of Stepping Stones Montessori to make sure that no child is picked up without a staff member's knowledge and that no child is released to an unauthorized person. **Children will be dismissed only to authorized persons listed on the Child Information Card.** A written note should be given or an email sent in conjunction with a phone call (in emergencies) if other arrangements are made for pick up.

12:00 or 3:30 - Primary and Toddler. Come to the playground gate, or Toddler Casa door. Your child should say goodbye to their Guide before leaving.

3:30 - Elementary: Staff will dismiss your child to you through the front entrance when they see you outside.

3:30 – 5:30 - Primary and Elementary After Care: Come to the main entrance. Use the keypad code to unlock the door. Pick up your child in the After Care room. If the group is on the playground, please come to the Childcare staff, and they will release your child to you. Toddler: come to the Toddler Classroom exterior door, and we will release your child to you.

LATE POLICY: We understand that extenuating circumstances can happen to any family and that occasional late arrivals may happen. However, if this becomes a regular occurrence or pattern, it can be detrimental to both the child and the classrooms as a whole. As such, these are the guidelines regarding late arrivals. Please remember that we are a school, not a drop-in daycare, and we have specific start times for ALL children, toddler through Elementary.

- If a child is arriving late regularly, a meeting between the parents/guardians and the Head of School will be called to discuss the continuance of enrollment and improvement plans.
- Children will not be permitted to enter after 9:00 am. Exceptions may be made in the case of pertinent appointments.

ITEMS TO BRING TO SCHOOL

Please label your child's extra clothing, including shoes and winter gear. If extra clothing is used during the day, please send another set of extra clothes the next day.

Toddler

Two extra sets of clothes that have been labeled (shirt, underpants, pants, socks), diapers, wipes and indoor shoes in a plastic grocery bag. We will provide a container for your child's belongings. See nap/ rest time for additional information.

Primary and Elementary

An extra set of clothes that have been labeled (shirt, underpants, pants, socks) all contained in a clear plastic shoebox. Children should wear shoes appropriate for running and other large motor activities and a 2nd pair of shoes to be worn only in the classroom. Please purchase shoes that are easy for the child to slip on and off. The clothes should be updated for season and size.

Rest and Nap Time

All children under 33 months of age are required by the Health Department to have a rest time, but do not have to sleep. Children may bring in a small blanket and crib sheet for rest time. All nap materials must be small enough to fit neatly in a pillowcase or small bag. Any quilts, sleeping bags, large pillows, etc. will be given back to the parent in exchange for something smaller.

Special Notes

- Gum and throat lozenges are discouraged because of the potential choking (and cleaning) hazard these items could create.
- Please return any small objects that come home in pockets, even if they seem of no apparent value. Our classrooms offer many sorting and counting exercises in the classrooms and completeness is most important to the learning process.

Snack

Each toddler, primary and elementary classroom has a Snack Basket that your child will take home once or twice per school year for primary and 3 times per school year for toddlers to provide snack for one full week for the class. Along with the basket there will be a list with suggestions for snacks. A calendar will be sent home to notify parents in advance that the basket will be gracing their home soon. The children are delighted by this special snack sharing and eagerly look forward to their turn with the basket.

This will count for 1 hour of volunteer time.

Elementary students are welcome to bring a snack from home to enjoy.

Allergies

With such a wide variety of food allergies our ability to meet the required health needs of all children for snack is very complex. We ask that children with specific food allergies provide notice to the front office so that we can do our best to accommodate, and, just in case, bring an optional snack option to be kept here.

Lunch

Your child will need to bring a lunch if they do not leave at noon. Please provide an ice pack for your child's lunch box if anything needs to be kept cold. Items that need *brief* warming (1 minute or less) can usually be accommodated.

We encourage children to eat all of their lunch and provide a quiet environment for them. A little note in the lunch box is a great way to greet your child midday. Children love to share these notes with their friends and staff.

In an effort to reduce our weekly trash and in coordination with our desire to spread the word about recycling to your children, we ask your cooperation with our lunch program. We ask that you pack:

- A cloth napkin
- Reusable eating utensils
- Reusable thermos or other drink containers - juice boxes/packs should not be sent

and will be returned to your child's lunchbox.

- Reusable, washable containers

Because we are teaching your children to recycle, please reflect on the packaging that you choose. All uneaten food, plastic wrap, napkin, thermos and utensils will be repacked in the lunch box to be returned home. This way you can see what your child has eaten for lunch and also how much trash was generated. Thank you for your cooperation and contribution to this important aspect of our program.

OUTDOOR TIME:

Outdoor playtime is an important and required part of our program. Children spend time outdoors daily unless it is extremely cold or raining. Staff will use their discretion regarding temperature and conditions. Please keep children at home who are not healthy enough to go outside. If your child has allergies or a medical condition that requires occasional rest indoors during outdoor play time, we will make a special accommodation. Children need to come to school in appropriate seasonal outdoor clothing. In the winter, this means winter coats, snow pants, boots, hats and mittens. To help eliminate loss, mittens should be attached to your child's jacket. Please clearly label all outdoor clothing. We are not responsible for lost clothing.

FIELD TRIPS:

Occasionally throughout the year the Kindergarten and Elementary children will be taken on field trips. These field trips serve as an extension of the Montessori curriculum. We want children to come to the understanding that learning is a lifelong process, an extension of one's curiosity, and that it extends beyond the walls of the school. Due to the fluid nature of our curriculum, some of these trips may be impromptu, such as a quick trip to the library or out on a hike to gather plant specimens. The Guide(s) and Assistants in charge of a field trip will assume responsibility for chaperoning all students taking the field trip sometimes with the help of volunteers. By signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians agree not to hold Stepping Stones Montessori or any of its employees or volunteers responsible for occurrences other than those caused by the gross negligence of the school, its employees, and its volunteers or as otherwise provided by law.

Forms

Field trip forms are to be returned to the office to be processed.

Walking Trips

Sometimes children (Toddler through Elementary) will be taken on short trips within walking distance from the school. The Guides and Assistants in charge of the trip will assume responsibility for providing reasonable chaperoning for all students taking the trip. Upon signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians give permission for their children to participate in walking field trips during the entire school year.

Bus Trips

Sometimes the Elementary children, Guides, Assistants and, when appropriate, volunteers will use the CATA bus system for field trips. Again, the staff, in charge of the trip, and volunteer(s) will assume responsibility for providing reasonable chaperoning for all students taking the trip. In signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians give permission for their children to participate in field trips using bus transportation during the entire school year.

Private Cars

No one under the age of 18 may be a volunteer driver. A volunteer driver may be a parent or other adult who has passed both the Central Registry and ICHAT background investigations conducted by Stepping Stones Montessori, has provided proof of insurance and valid driver's license, has signed the Field Trip Transportation Form, and has received permission from the Head of School to drive students on field trips during the specified school year.

Transportation for field trips and extracurricular activities is sometimes provided by volunteers and/or staff members in private cars. Any damages resulting from personal injuries sustained by adults or children due to the volunteer's ownership, operation or maintenance of the vehicle used must be recovered through the driver's personal insurance coverage of the passenger.

Stepping Stones Montessori provides liability coverage for its staff members, but no insurance coverage or liability for the ownership, maintenance, operational expense or any injury or damages to persons, students or the property of others that may occur from the use of a non-school vehicle.

By signing the Parent/Guardian Handbook Acknowledgement, parents and/or guardians provide consent for their children to ride with a volunteer and/or staff member driver on field trips during the school year, and will provide a booster or car seat if required.

TOILET TRAINING/DIAPERING:

Primary

It is required that your child be toilet trained before entering the Primary Program. This means using cloth underpants: no *Pull-Ups*, and the child not needing regular bathroom reminders, or help wiping. We will assist with occasional accidents. If wetting or soiling becomes habitual, it may be necessary to pause attendance until your child has completed toilet learning. This is required due to licensing standards and staff ratios for the 3-6 year old group.

Toddler

Toilet training will be planned and carried out cooperatively between parents and staff. Training will begin when the child appears ready. A child generally does not have muscle control needed to start toilet training until about 18 months. The child must be able to walk and talk. When the

parents and guide note a child's interest and readiness, they will work together to decide on the process. In general, children will be offered to sit on the toilet for brief periods (no longer than five minutes). Praise will be given for successes. Words for toileting will be chosen with the parents and used consistently. Bowel training will usually be first. The child's normal pattern will be noted to determine times to attempt toileting. Bladder training will usually be second. Children having "accidents" will be treated in a positive manner. "Accidents" are part of the process of learning, and therefore are not upsetting for the adults in our Casa. We will reassure and never force.

Soiled clothing and diapers will not be washed out at the school. They will be placed in sealed plastic bags, labeled and sent home daily.

Diapering of toddlers will be done as needed throughout the day. Parents/guardians must provide diapers (disposable or from a commercial diaper service) and baby wipes. Only creams, lotions, and powders provided by parents will be used and only when accompanied by the Topical/Non-Prescription form. In the Montessori Toddler program we do diapering with the child standing up, instead of laying down on a changing table. The child participates in this by holding their shirt up. This is part of promoting their independence. Supplies will be kept in a cupboard at the changing area. Diapering procedures are posted in the toileting area. A record of diapering will be kept for parents/guardians to view.

BIRTHDAYS:

On, or near, a student's birthday (or half-birthday in the case of summer birthdays), we love to celebrate. Montessori provides a special way to celebrate which includes the birthday walk (showing how many times a child has gone around the sun), a poem, song and the showing of a timeline of the child's life. Parents are invited to join us for this celebration, as are siblings. You will receive a note a week or so before your child's birthday to set a day and time for the celebration. We will go through the various steps of the celebration and parents will be invited to share a few stories about their child. If your child would like to bring a snack of fruits or vegetables (real fruit popsicles are also acceptable) to share with their classmates at lunch, please drop it off with him/her in the morning. Check with your child's Guide for specific information regarding birthday protocol in the classroom. Please do not send in gift bags for the children.

If you choose to have a party for your child outside of school, invitations to parties may be distributed in class ONLY if the entire class is invited. We understand that you may not be able to invite every child, however, in those cases we ask that you send your invitations to those children outside of school. The children are very aware of when they are not invited and feel excluded when they don't receive an invitation. If you do not have contact info for a family you would like to invite, the office can help facilitate communication.

PHOTOGRAPHY OF CHILDREN:

Throughout the year other students, parents, staff and occasionally the local media may photograph children. These photographs may be used in school publications or community publications. Our student photographers choose shots at random and we rely on parent photos as well. This creates a mixed collection of shots from all age levels. We never intentionally highlight or omit a particular child through our photography. If you are opposed to your child's photograph being used in school publications or student picture boards, please sign a waiver in the office. We will review all waivers before publishing. If we do not have a waiver on file we will assume that we have your permission to use photography that includes your child in our school publications. No person may post children's photographs on any social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) outside the official school operated sites without the written consent of the parent or guardian.

II. PARENT/SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

The child who thrives in a Montessori school environment receives the same messages and guidance at home to promote independence, respectful interactions, and peaceful conflict resolution. Parents must agree to apply this philosophy at home with their child, and communicate with staff and administration with respect when asking questions and resolving conflicts. Not doing so will be grounds for dismissal.

OBSERVATION POLICY:

Parents are welcome to observe in classrooms. An appointment for observation will control the amount of visitors in the classroom. We encourage at least a one-day notice for observations. Also, please note that observations will usually not be scheduled until after the first 6 weeks of school; this allows the classroom to become established and begin to "normalize".

SCHOOL-TO-HOME COMMUNICATIONS:

We hold your child in the highest regard and want to work with you to maintain open lines of communication. In order to establish clear communication between Stepping Stones Montessori and parents/guardians, throughout the year we will use the following methods:

As such, we require that all parents read all communications thoroughly. This is absolutely vital to keeping you informed and connected to the school.

- **Parent/Guardian-Guide Conferences:** There are two formal conferences held each year, one in the fall and one in the spring. The Guide is also available for a conference if given advance notice.
- **Classroom newsletters:** These are issued periodically by the classroom Guide.
- **Stepping Stones Updates** This is a regular email from the front office that informs you about upcoming events and/or current issues.
- **Handouts:** These are usually issued before events and used as reminders of items mentioned in the newsletter. Some handouts require a parental/guardian response whether

or not you will attend. Please respond in a timely manner. These notes will be distributed by the Guides, or placed on the clips above where your child stores their things in the hall.

- **Bulletin Boards:** General school postings and local events are listed on the school bulletin boards.
- **School Calendar of Events & Special Dates:** Calendars for all-school and classroom-specific events are maintained through the CALENDARS tab on our website: ssmeastlansing.org
- **Parent/Guardian Education Opportunities** - Montessori philosophy, curriculum and child development issues are discussed at these events. We seek a partnership relationship with parents/guardians and value your ideas. Your attendance at these meetings serves as a way for you to foster your child's educational growth and build community with other parents and staff.

Communication with Your Child's Guide

We encourage parent/guardian participation at Stepping Stones Montessori; your input is always welcome. Email is the best vehicle for communication with your Lead Guide; however, responses will not be immediate. Our guides check and respond to email after the school day is over. If you have an urgent message, email or call the front office. Your message will be delivered. It is best to send emails about daily procedures, illness, and pick-up changes to **both the office and Lead Guide**. Parents/Guardians should also be responsible for contacting the Guide and/or Head of School regarding any problems, concerns or complaints that may arise during the year. All issues will be openly discussed and addressed in order that the problem or concern may be resolved. PLEASE KEEP COMMUNICATION WITH THE STAFF OPEN.

PROCEDURE FOR CLASSROOM QUESTIONS & CONCERNS:

1. Contact your Lead Guide via email. You and the Guide will decide if the concern can be answered via email or phone call, or if a meeting is necessary.
2. If further discussion is needed, schedule a meeting with the Guide, to address the concern and work toward resolution.
3. If after your discussions with the Guide, you still have concerns, make an appointment with the Head of School to work towards a resolution within an agreed upon time frame.
4. If concerns are not addressed to everyone's satisfaction within the agreed upon time frame, the parents, Guide, and the Head of School shall meet to decide what further action is required.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND FEE PROGRAM:

Volunteer Opportunities

Our children participate in the care of their Casa as a part of their lessons in practical life: they wash windows, chairs, tables and they sweep the floors and fold laundry. They take pride in their work and in

knowing that they are contributing to the preservation of their environment. A parent's involvement in the school helps a child develop more pride in their school and classroom and provides immense joy to the child. Any special talent that you are willing to share with the children is greatly appreciated; art projects, sewing, storytelling, baking, singing, bringing in artifacts, sharing some aspect of your occupation are all appreciated. We also offer the chance to chaperone field trips, lead reading groups, serve on the Board of Directors, and beautify our buildings and grounds. On a regular basis you can also volunteer for class jobs, such as laundry, recycling, shopping, etc. You will find sign-up sheets posted outside each of the classrooms. We ask that each family sign up for one classroom job per year.

In-Lieu of Volunteering Fee Program

We understand that all of our families have different constraints on their time and finances, thus families are given the choice between donating 16 hours of their time to the school during the course of the school year or paying a \$256 fee. (\$16/hr) Volunteer hours must be logged on the volunteer slips provided by the office and returned to the tuition box. If a family is unable to donate the full 16 hours during the course of the year, that family's prorated fee will be charged at the end of the year in May. For families starting AFTER September the hours are reduced by 2 hours for each month prior to enrollment.

Sample Standard Volunteer Activities and Hours

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------|---|----------|
| ● Laundry | - 1 hour | ● Misc. shopping | - varies |
| ● Bringing flowers | - ½ hour | ● School events | - varies |
| ● Shopping for pet food | - ½ hour | ● Providing snacks for aftercare | - ½ hour |
| ● Bringing library books | - 1 hour | ● Driving for field trips | - varies |
| | | ● Pet Care over breaks | - varies |

**Always visit the school website for the up-to-date volunteer opportunities
ssmeastlansing.org/get-involved*

Parent Education Requirements and Opportunities

We require new parents to attend a Montessori 101 class in June or September, and the Parent Orientation in August. We also expect all Stepping Stones Montessori parents to participate in a minimum of TWO parent education events in the school year. **Any participation in parent education opportunities will be counted towards volunteer hours.**

Examples of Parent Education Events

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| ● Montessori 101 | ● International Fair |
| ● Parent Orientation | ● Additional Parent Education Workshops |
| ● Elementary First Fridays | |
| ● Presentation Night | |

**Always visit the school website for the up-to-date volunteer opportunities*

CLEARANCE AND SUPERVISION OF VOLUNTEERS:

Requirement from the Department of Human Services Central Registry Clearance and Michigan Internet Criminal History - Access Tool (ICHAT) Verification for Volunteers

The Michigan Child Protection Law, MCL 722.625 *et seq.*, requires the Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) to maintain a Central Registry of perpetrators of child abuse and neglect. In accordance with DHS licensing rules, and because the safety of our students is of paramount importance, Stepping Stones Montessori requires that all adults who work with children have a Central Registry Clearance Form on file with the school. If you are interested in volunteering with the school, please ask the office for a Request for Central Registry Clearance (DHS-194). Fill out the form, attach a copy of your driver's license or State identification and give the form to the Director of Operations or her designee.

In addition, Stepping Stones Montessori requires that all adults who work with children have a criminal background check using the ICHAT system operated by the Michigan State Police. If you are interested in volunteering with the school, please complete and return the necessary forms provided by the office.

The Head of School will report any adverse information to the volunteer applicant. Volunteers should be aware that there are errors in the Central Registry and ICHAT databases. If you feel that there is an error about your background in the Central Registry or ICHAT database, please ask the Head of School for information on how to correct the error. All volunteer information from the Central Registry and ICHAT will be kept confidential by the school.

Volunteers New to the State of Michigan

All volunteers who have not lived in Michigan for the past 10 years must provide a criminal history check from their previous state(s).

Signed Statement

All volunteers must sign a statement indicating whether they have been convicted of any crimes other than a traffic violation along with any details of the conviction.

Supervision of Volunteers

As stated above, all volunteers who work with children must have a Central Registry Clearance Form on file with the school and have completed an ICHAT criminal background check. If your name is not on the registry or in the ICHAT system, you will be eligible to work as a volunteer. If your name is on the registry or in the ICHAT system, or if you are not willing to submit for clearance, you will not be able to volunteer at the school. Ultimately, the Head of School will determine whether or not someone who has a Clearance Form on file and whose name was not in the ICHAT system may volunteer at the

school. The goal is to create an environment that is safe for our children.

All volunteers must check in at the front office and with a Guide in the classroom of the children with whom the volunteer will be working. At the end of the volunteer experience, the volunteer should report to a Guide in the classroom to say that the volunteer is leaving.

Any volunteer who will be taking children away from the school building must work with staff to ensure that the volunteer is taking only the children they have been assigned to take. The volunteer must take the copies of the Emergency Cards for the children in their care and keep them with them the entire time the children are in their care. The volunteer is encouraged to have accessible means to contact the school or emergency personnel, if necessary. (Such as a mobile phone) At the end of the volunteer experience, the volunteer must report to a Guide to ensure that all of the children are safely returned to the care of the school.

Health of Volunteers

Any volunteers who regularly volunteer more than four (4) hours per week working directly with the children will provide a signed note from their physician indicating that the volunteer is free from communicable tuberculosis, verified within 1 year before employment or volunteering, R400.8128.

FUNDRAISING AND DONATIONS:

At Stepping Stones Montessori, we choose fundraisers that are consistent with our school values. As a non-profit institution, we rely on fundraising for financial support. Fundraising each year will be used for our school's growth and improvement for obtaining valuable 'extras' for our children, our staff and/or our families. In the past we have used fundraising to increase financial aid offerings, allow staff to attend professional development and improve the building and grounds. Your participation in the functioning of these events are an ideal way to achieve your volunteer opportunities. Many families exceed their volunteer hours through the help in planning, preparing, and running a fundraising event.

Annual Giving at Stepping Stones Montessori

We value and appreciate the engagement of all the families in our community through our fundraisers and your generous donations. The Stepping Stones Montessori environment cannot thrive without your continuous involvement. We have a strong group of families, friends and alumni in our school and many ask, "What can I do?" We ask each family for a tax-deductible donation during the year to ensure that we can keep tuition as low as possible to make the school affordable for as many families as we can.

"There are many important causes in our communities to which we give our time and financial support, but the most important investment that we can make in our lifetime is in our own children's future. Fostering a love for learning at a young age and nurturing our children to become responsible, productive, and compassionate adults may be the greatest gift we can provide this and future

generations. In the spirit of helping our children grow and fulfill their destiny, we hope you will consider supporting Stepping Stones with a gift to the Annual Fund every year.

Stepping Stones needs your help to provide each child with the space and place to continue their quest for knowledge, understanding, and discovery. Like most independent schools, tuition alone does not cover the full cost of a child's education. Stepping Stones relies on the kindness and generosity of philanthropic support to keep tuition affordable, and provide for the projects and programs that assist in creating a learning environment that nurtures the development of the whole child. An investment in Stepping Stones is an investment in the future because it helps us to consistently provide the attention and nurturing that is the foundation of a Montessori education. Your additional financial support is both an act of "giving back" as well as a thoughtful effort to "pay forward" for those children who will benefit from the education that you helped build and preserve.

As you consider your philanthropic giving, please remember that gifts to Stepping Stones Montessori will keep it an exceptional place to educate children and free their potential. No contribution is too small to help us meet our goals. Broad participation with these efforts helps us know that our community is engaged and excited."

**Annual Giving Letter written by Kelly Feinberg,
a Stepping Stones Montessori parent of six years*

Other Major Fundraising Events:

Spaghetti Dinner

This is a community event that the children look forward to every year. Families volunteer to cook various parts of the meal, and the whole community comes together to eat and celebrate what we love about our school. All the income comes from ticket sales.

School Apparel Sale

Stepping Stones will sell clothing and accessories with the Stepping Stones logo.

Local Restaurant Nights

We are very fortunate to have a community around our school that appreciates the value our children and program brings to where we live, and who are willing to show it by donating back to the school. Periodically we will have a night where a local restaurant will donate a percentage of their sales back to the school. This is a very generous action, and we encourage all families to take a night off of cooking and cleaning and take the family out. We also encourage our families to show our gratitude to these community restaurants by choosing them over another option if available.

Material Donations

We value and appreciate your material contributions. Please contact the school administration with donations (technology, play and learning equipment, kitchen goods, etc.) to assess the need and suitability to the school, especially to the Montessori principles to which we adhere.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

HEALTH

Sickness Procedure

Please call the school if your child will not be in on a scheduled day. The following guidelines have been established, not to inconvenience you, but to protect other children who will be susceptible to the following contagions. Most importantly, if your child is ill, they will feel much more comfortable being tended to at home.

PLEASE DO NOT BRING YOUR CHILD TO SCHOOL WHEN THEY ARE SICK.

Children having any of the following symptoms should not come to school and parents need to let the office know by email.

- Fever over 100° F (indication of infection)
- Has been on antibiotics less than 24 hours
- Vomiting (in last 24 hours)
- Persistent cough
- Diarrhea – if two cases of diarrhea occur parents will be notified.
- Unidentified rash – should be investigated by a physician
- Excessive discharge from nose or eyes. Thick mucus, pus draining from eyes.
- Contagious childhood diseases such as croup, chicken pox, rotavirus, hand-foot-mouth, fifth disease, strep, etc.
- Upper respiratory infections and sore throat – parents of a child with a viral respiratory infection should rely on all applicable guidelines to determine when to return to school. Children with a bacterial respiratory infection including: tonsillitis, bronchitis, pneumonia, strep throat, or otitis media (ear infection), that is being treated with antibiotics should be on the prescription for 24 hours before returning to school.
- Overall change in behavior. If your child cannot participate in regular classroom activities and/or requires constant attention of one staff member, they are required to stay home.
- COVID-19 We will continue to follow MDHHS/ICHHD guidelines for positive cases and exposures, which may include but are not limited to testing on specific days, quarantine, and closures.
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If any of the above symptoms develop while your child is attending school, you or your emergency person, (listed on Child Information Card) will be notified to come for your child. To protect others, we may have your child wear a mask in the office while waiting to be picked up.

Allow a period of 24 hours to pass after the last incident of vomiting, diarrhea, etc. before returning to school.

When a case of a communicable disease (e.g. strep throat, pink-eye, and fifth disease) is reported to the school, a note is posted to inform you of your child's exposure.

Medication Policy

Whether prescription or non-prescription, medication is administered to a child only upon written request of the parent. The medication must be in the original container with the child's name and directions clearly labeled. Following are the procedures used:

- Parent/guardian completes and signs Medication Permission & Instructions form (BCAL 1243)
- Parent/guardian brings medication with medication release form to the office
- A staff person administers all medication, logs information and then places it with other medications

NOTES ON SAFETY:

It is the responsibility of Stepping Stones Montessori to make sure that no child is picked up without a staff member's knowledge and that no child is released to an unauthorized person. **Children will be dismissed only to authorized persons listed on the Child Information Card.** A written note should be given or a signed email sent in conjunction with a phone call (in emergencies) if other arrangements are made for pick up.

CHILD INFORMATION CARDS:

It is the parents' responsibility to keep the Child Information Card updated with current emergency numbers and healthcare information. Notify the school as to if for any reason, you will only be reachable by a phone number other than the one on the Child Information Card. Cards must be updated ANNUALLY.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROCEDURES:

Posted in each room is a copy of Stepping Stones' Emergency Response Procedures. Please feel free to familiarize yourself with this document.

In case of the need for reunification with your child after an emergency in which we have evacuated the school, the site is The Edgewood United Church, across the street from our school.

BAD WEATHER:

Parents are advised to check our website (ssmeastlansing.org/) and our Facebook page (facebook.com/SteppingStonesMontessoriSchoolInEastLansing), as well as their Procure App and email to keep up-to-date on school closings due to weather conditions. We typically follow East Lansing Public Schools in these decisions. We also post on the WILX school closings site.

If bad weather occurs after the school day has begun, the sessions will continue as usual through the scheduled dismissal times. Any parent who wishes to come early to pick up their child may do so.

In an emergency that is serious enough to close the school, parents/guardians or designated emergency contact persons will be notified via email, and the announcement will be posted on our Facebook page and website.

III. Enrollment & Tuition:

ENROLLMENT POLICY:

It is the policy of Stepping Stones Montessori to enroll children committed to the three-year cycle on a first-come, first-serve basis with consideration of age and gender and the space in each classroom. Priority is given to siblings of children already in attendance. In order to finalize an application, a signed enrollment contract and a \$200 non-refundable initial enrollment fee are required. All re-enrollment applications will be charged a \$85 non-refundable enrollment fee. New parents and children are invited to meet with their Lead Guide before the first day of attendance.

TUITION POLICY:

You have three options for paying the school year tuition, as described on your enrollment contract. You may pay the whole amount on August 15th, two installments on August 15th and January 15th, or 10 equal installments from Aug. to May, which are due on the 15th of each month. Tuition must be paid online through Tuition Express via the Procure portal. You will receive an invoice by email/Procure on the first of every month. Payments will be automatically processed through Tuition Express on the 15th of the month. **PLEASE WAIT for this automatic payment instead of paying before the 15th. Using the ACH payment option is best.** If you choose to use a credit card, you will be charged a fee for that use at the current market rate. (most are currently 2.7% + .30 but it varies per card) If you use a debit card, you will be charged a fee for that use at the current market rate. (varies per card).

LATE FEES:

Late Payments - Monthly payments are considered late after the fifteenth of the month. A \$35 late fee will be added to payments after this date, if payment is not made due to insufficient funds. Payments overdue by 30 days may result in cancellation of enrollment of your child until payment is made. Parents will be notified in writing of overdue tuition. In the case of financial difficulty, please contact the Head of School to make special arrangements. If no arrangements are made, parents will be notified and the account will be charged.

Pick-up After Closing - If a child is not picked up by the school closing time of 5:30 P.M. a flat fine of \$10 will be charged for the first ten minutes and \$1 for each additional minute past the first ten minutes. There will be no discounts off this charge.

Financial Assistance- Eligibility for financial assistance is based on family size and the *adjusted gross annual family income (AGI)*. We must receive our Scholarship Application with the supporting income statement and a signed tax return (IRS 1040) for both parents. Please ask in the main office for an application. Applications must be completed within 10 days of submitting your enrollment contract.

Sibling Discount - Families enrolling a second child will receive a 10% discount on the first child's tuition.

Early Payment Discount - Families who choose to pay annually in August will receive a 2% discount.

OTHER FEES/CHARGES:

- **Supply Fee.** We assess a one-time supply fee in August of \$100.00. This is in lieu of asking you to shop for school supplies. Thank you.
- **Returned Checks** - There is a \$50 fee for returned checks.
- **Drop In Care** – Please see the drop-in care pricing and procedures sheet.

Financial Assistance/ Discounts:

- All discounts and financial aid forms can be requested from the main office.
- Discounts are based on assessment of need, so you will need to turn in your IRS 1040 form to receive a discount
- Each family is eligible for only one discount at a time. You may not combine discounts (example - faculty discount and sibling discount)

Schedule Changes:

- Requests for permanent changes to a student's daily schedule must be made through the office using a permanent change of schedule form.
- Daily changes to a student's schedule (late arrivals, early pick up) must be sent to the office email. We will inform your Lead Guide. (office@steppingstoneseastatlansing.org)

INACTIVE ACCOUNTS:

- Tuition accounts which have an outstanding balance after the fiscal school year (currently July 31st) will be classified as "inactive" and turned over to a collection agency after three written notices (requesting payment of the total outstanding balance) have been mailed to the address on file.
- Tuition accounts which have a credit balance and have had no activity for a period of one year will be deemed as "inactive" and monies from such accounts will become the property of Stepping Stones Montessori. Three written notices will be mailed to the address on file before such action is taken.

TERMINATION:

The School's Right to Terminate

The school reserves the right to terminate the enrollment contract, for any reason, including, but not limited to, if the Guide and the Head of School determine that the child or family is struggling to be successful in our school and would be more successful in an environment that is different from what we provide. The school also reserves the right to terminate the enrollment contract if the child has shown continued disruptive, disrespectful, or harmful behavior. The working environment of the classroom and the well-being of the children and staff is paramount, and anything that could prevent a child from learning and growing in a safe and harmonious environment will absolutely not be allowed. It is always the school's intention to inform the parents/guardians immediately of any problems and ideally a collaborative approach and resolution can be made together. The right to terminate is not something the school takes lightly. At times a child will present with behaviors or needs that need evaluation, expertise, and more attention than we can provide with our staffing ratio. We will help advise parents regarding next steps for support. We may not be able to keep the child in attendance at Stepping Stones.

The parent(s)/guardian(s) understands that the school owes a duty and obligation to all of the children in the program, and agrees that it is the school's duty to do what it thinks would benefit the mission and learning environment of the other children. The school may take a number of actions, one being termination of a contract. The right to terminate will only be taken after the school has assessed the situation fully. The school will always weigh all the options and make efforts to address the issue(s) prior to this step. The parent(s) and the school agree that preservation of the learning environment is crucial, and the school has ultimate say for what is best. In order to keep a learning environment that is aligned with the philosophy and mission of the school is so important, the decision to terminate, unless expressly stated elsewhere, will be at the sole discretion of the Head of School.

If a student threatens bodily harm on another person while under the term of the contract, this will not be taken lightly and may lead to the use of more serious measures without any attempt to remediate. Such measures include immediate removal from the school property and even immediate termination of the contract/enrollment. The parent(s) and the school agree that preservation of the learning environment is crucial, and the school has ultimate say for what is best. In order to keep a learning environment that is aligned with the philosophy and mission of the school is so important, the decision to terminate, unless expressly stated elsewhere, will be at the sole discretion of the Head of School.

The parent(s)/guardian(s) understand that this is a learning environment where violence and aggression will not be tolerated from anybody. If there is an issue with a student, and there is a disagreement with how it was handled, the school is open to hearing what it is, and encourages each and every parent/guardian to have an open dialogue with the school. The best and only way to do this is if there is a concern, for the parent/guardian to contact the front office and schedule a time to meet with staff and administration so that (1) the matter will get the attention it requires and (2) it does not disrupt the learning environment of the other children. However, if at any time the staff feels threatened, the in-person discussions will cease immediately and reconvene at another time, and possibly through another medium, at the discretion of the Board of Directors. This will be done so an objective party who was not present at the first discussion can try to mediate and facilitate

further discussions. If the Board of Directors and/or its proxy does not feel that discussions are being handled in a respectful way, or that a staff member may be in harm, the Board may issue an order to terminate the contract, and restrict any further access to the school and its property by the child, the parent/guardian, or any other family member. The Head of School and/or any other administrator will not have the discretion or ability to reinstate the terminated contract or undo the decision of the Board of Directors.

To be clear, violence and/or aggression at the school is contrary to the mission and philosophy of the school and will not be tolerated. By signing your enrollment contract and/or acknowledging receipt of this handbook you agree that if the school or Board determines somebody could be a threat to the health, safety or wellbeing of anybody or disrupt the environment for the children who want to learn in a safe environment, then they have the right to terminate the enrollment contract.

If parents are not following the policies in the handbook and contract, the school has the right to terminate enrollment.

If the school terminates the contract, the termination will take effect immediately, and will be followed by a written notice. The parent(s) and/or guardian(s) agree that any actions the school takes as stated in the “Discipline in the Montessori Environment” will not be construed as a “constructive termination” to the contract. The school will make its intention to end a contract as stated above. The parent(s)/guardian(s) will be responsible for tuition through the last day of attendance.

The Parent(s)/Guardian’s Right to Terminate

The parent may cancel this the enrollment contract **with a minimum of 30 days written notice prior to withdrawal**. If the notice is emailed, the subject line must contain “Termination of Contract Notice”. If the notice is delivered by hand, the phrase “Termination of Contract Notice” should be present either on the top of the notice or above the signature of the parent(s)/guardian. Regardless of when the notice of cancellation is provided by the parent(s)/guardian(s), they are still obligated to pay the tuition **for 30 days following their notice**.

To determine the amount owed, all parties agree to use the following formula. The number of days owed will be 30 calendar days from the date of the written notice to the office. If the notice is mid-month, then you will owe the rest of that month, and whatever number of days extend over to the next month until 30 calendar days have been met. Payment will be calculated by taking the last payment invoiced prior to the request, dividing it by 30 to determine the amount per day owed. That amount will be multiplied by the number of days into the next month left to satisfy the remainder of the 30 calendar days. Your billing period will be determined by your Tuition Express paperwork.

Examples:

- 1) If you cancel on the first day of a new billing period, you will only owe that next month’s bill.
- 2) If you cancel on the 15th day of a billing period, you will owe the remaining 15 days of that

billing period, and 15 more days into the next.

- 3) If you cancel on the last day of a billing period, you will owe the rest of that month (1 day) and 29 days into the next period.
- 4) If you have paid one annual payment in August, or in 2 installments, we will reimburse accordingly.

Only a written agreement from the Board can alter the termination obligations, and any request for a deviation must be made in writing within 5 business days of the cancellation notice and submitted to the main office at Stepping Stones.

SCHOOL CLOSING:

No tuition refunds will be given for unscheduled closings, such as snow days, power failure or the like. Families are not eligible for refunds for days that the child does not attend due to illness or vacation.

TAX INFORMATION:

An end of the year tax statement, to verify tuition for income tax purposes, may be obtained from the office. The Employer Identification Number of Stepping Stones Montessori School is:

EIN # 38-2419295

Please notify the office if you will need a monthly receipt for payment of your child's tuition. Reimbursement forms from employers will be signed after tuition has been paid.

LICENSING NOTEBOOK:

There shall be a licensing notebook on the premises which includes all licensing inspection and special investigation reports and related corrective action plans since May 28, 2010 and a summary sheet outlining the documents contained in the notebook. The notebook shall be made available to parents and prospective parents at all times during the center's normal hours of operation.