

# **HISTORY OF RICHLAND ACADEMY**

C. Joyce Page established Richland Academy in 1982 as a private preschool dedicated to the teaching philosophy of Dr. Maria Montessori. Licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Richland Academy was, and still is, one of the few preschools in Johnstown licensed as a Private Academic Preschool and Kindergarten. In 1983, Richland Academy became a non-profit organization, electing its first volunteer Board of Directors. The Kindergarten program began being offered this same year, transforming our preschool into an authentic, multiage Montessori Preprimary Program. 1984 marked the first year that Childcare services were offered to Richland Academy working families. The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services licenses our Childcare Programs. Having out-grown our former facility on Budfield Street, Richland Academy opened its doors to students in the historic, former Elton Elementary School building in 1991. In 1997, Richland Academy expanded its program offerings to include the Toddler Program. In 2013, due to the continued success of the preprimary program, Richland Academy relocated to East Hills Commons in Richland Township expanding into two preprimary classrooms and adding an infant program. With this growth, Richland Academy has realized its vision of educating and caring for children from infancy through Kindergarten.

## **PHILOSOPHY AND MISSION STATEMENT**

The programs at Richland Academy are committed to providing an individualized education, which combines the Montessori method of early childhood education with current research about developmentally appropriate practices. Our programs aim to educate the whole child within warm environments which foster a life-long love of learning, nurture positive self-concepts, and lay the foundations for future success in our multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, linguistically-diverse world. Although the environments, structure, materials, staff, and curriculum differ according to the category of service provided (academic programs or childcare) and according to the ages of children served (infant, toddler, preschool, Kindergarten); all of the Programs at Richland Academy share common views of the child, the classroom environment, and the teacher.

### **Richland Academy views the child as:**

- the constructor of his own knowledge and an active participant in his individual learning experience (in collaboration with the teacher).
- capable of making choices within a carefully designed environment.
- possessing sensitive periods and following universal, predictable sequences of growth and change during the first 6 years of life.
- worthy of an attitude of mutual respect, equal in humanity, if not in development, experience, or education.

### **Richland Academy views the classroom environment as:**

- a carefully "prepared environment" which strives to be harmonious, supportive, child-centered, consistent, and non-competitive.
- an aesthetically pleasing, safe, and clean space where child-initiated, child-directed, teacher supported activity thrives.
- balancing the developmental needs of each individual child with those of the classroom community as a whole.
- engaging each child in age-appropriate experiences that enhance intellectual, communicative, perceptual, physical, social, and emotional growth and development.
- designed to promote authentic learning (understood as the process of making meaning out of experiences and interactions).
- utilizing hands-on, concrete materials and experiences as the building blocks for the later development of abstract thought.
- balancing the development of critical thinking strategies and positive dispositions toward learning with the acquisition of specific skills and information.

### **Richland Academy views the teacher as:**

- the vital link between the child and the prepared environment.
- the designer of a prepared environment that is responsive to, and shaped by, the emotional, physical, social, and intellectual needs of each child within the class.
- committed to assisting children in realizing their unique, immense, inner potential.
- capable of true respect for the child as the constructor of her own intelligence and character.
- an observer, guide, role model, protector, and resource in the classroom learning community.
- dedicated to providing authentic, meaning-making experiences for children that draw upon their personal interests and are relevant to their life.
- capable of offering choices to children and willing to allow them to take the natural or logical consequences for both appropriate and inappropriate choices.
- recognizers of the parents as the child's first teachers, fostering communication and collaboration related to their child's growth and development.

## **ABSENTEEISM**

Please inform the staff of anticipated absences due to illness by leaving a message on the answering machine or by calling in the morning before 8:00 a.m. Absences due to scheduled appointments or vacations should be communicated prior to the absence via a written note. Parents of Kindergarten students who ride the bus must notify their bus company of absences.

**Childcare Cancellation Policy:** Adjustments to the previously submitted childcare schedule must be made prior to 6:00 a.m. on the day of service. Failure to do so will result in a charge for the time previously scheduled.

## **APPLICATIONS AND ENROLLMENT POLICY**

**Infant:** The Infant Program is open to children 6 weeks (minimum age) to 12 months of age. Enrollment opportunities are based on current space availability. Registration for currently enrolled students begins in February. New student registration will begin on March 1<sup>st</sup>. We encourage families to schedule an appointment to tour the classroom, meet the teachers, and fill out an application. Students will be accepted on a space-available basis. Priority is given to currently enrolled students, siblings of currently enrolled students, students who had previously attended, siblings of alumni, families enrolling more than one child to any program, students requiring all day care, and then to children from the community (in that order). The date of the application is also considered in the selection process. An annual, non-refundable application fee is due at the time of registration.

**Toddler:** The Toddler Program is open to children 12 months (minimum age) to three years old. Enrollment opportunities are based on current space availability. Registration for currently enrolled students begins in February. New student registration will begin on March 1<sup>st</sup>. We encourage families to schedule an appointment to tour the classroom, meet the teachers, and fill out an application. Students will be accepted on a space-available basis. Priority is given to currently enrolled students, siblings of currently enrolled students, students who had previously attended, siblings of alumni, families enrolling more than one child to any program, students requiring all day care, and then to children from the community (in that order). The date of the application is also considered in the selection process. An annual, non-refundable application fee is due at the time of registration.

**Preprimary:** The Montessori preprimary program is opened to children 2.7 (at date of enrollment) to 6 years of age. Children must be able to use the bathroom independently. Kindergarten students must meet the Kindergarten age restrictions of their local public school district or be 5 years old by September 1<sup>st</sup>. Enrollment opportunities are based on current space availability. Registration for currently enrolled students begins in February. New student registration will begin on March 1<sup>st</sup>. We encourage families to schedule an appointment to tour the classroom, meet the teachers, and fill out an application. Students will be accepted on a space-available basis. Priority is given to currently enrolled students, siblings of currently enrolled students, students who had previously attended, siblings of alumni, families enrolling more than one child to any program, students requiring all day care, and then to children from the community (in that order). The date of the application is also considered in the selection process. An annual, non-refundable application fee is due at the time of registration.

## **ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL**

On time arrival to school is imperative for all families. All children should arrive at school dressed and ready to start their day. Teachers plan activities for children that begin promptly at the start of program time. Beginning the day on time allows for the child to participate fully in valuable learning experiences and social interactions.

We ask that families arrive no more than 10 minutes prior to your child's scheduled class time. Since the morning programs begin at 8:45 a.m. teachers will welcome your child using the car line system from 8:35 a.m. - 8:55 a.m. For our afternoon program, teachers will welcome your child using the car line system from 12:20 p.m. - 12:40 p.m. Families needing to bring their child to school earlier or pick up later than the scheduled class time should submit their childcare schedule requests to the Childcare Director. For more information about childcare, refer to the section titled: "Childcare Services in our Montessori Home Environment."

**Arrival:** Upon arrival, children will be met at their car by a staff member and escorted into the school. Please be sure your child is wearing their shoes, coat, etc. and is ready to exit the vehicle. There is no need for other family members to exit the vehicle. Once the children enter the building, we will allow the child to get ready for their day as independently as possible. Children will be encouraged to hang-up their outerwear, remove their own shoes, and put on their slippers independently. Tote bags and coats should be placed on the hooks. Lunchboxes are to be placed on the shelf above. Shoes, boots, and slippers are to be placed in the box below.

Please be aware that sometimes during the first days of school, a staff member may have to carry a child into the school. Children generally calm down quickly once inside the building. If for some reason a child does not, the child's family will be contacted.

In order to keep the car line moving as efficiently as possible, please ensure that all communication is prepared in writing and submitted to school using the Pony Express Folders and/or Infant/Toddler Communication Folders which should be kept inside the child's tote bag.

Please refer to the last page in the handbook for a map indicating the traffic flow during the car line. Please be respectful of pedestrians entering and exiting surrounding businesses by allowing room between vehicles while in the car line.

**Childcare Arrivals:** Families arriving to school before or after the scheduled car line time should abide by the following procedure: (1) park your vehicle; (2) ring the bell at the front door; (3) a staff member will greet your child and escort him to his classroom.

**Late Arrivals:** If your child is late, arriving after the scheduled car line time, and a staff member is no longer monitoring the door, please abide by the following procedure: (1) park your vehicle; (2) ring the bell at the front door; (3) a staff member will greet your child and escort her to her classroom. Families habitually late for arrival will be asked to meet with a Director to discuss a plan for promoting on-time arrivals.

**Dismissal:** Please park and wait outside the building at the main entrance to pick-up your child at dismissal time. If we are playing outside, please park in the parking lot and walk to the fenced outdoor play area. Please do not block traffic. The morning academic programs dismiss at 11:45 a.m. Extended Day ends at 2:30 p.m. Our afternoon program is over at 3:30 p.m. Since our parking lot is

extremely busy, for your child's safety, do not under any circumstances allow your child to venture into the driveway without you by their side.

**Childcare Dismissal:** Please park your car, ring the bell at the front door, and a staff member will be with you momentarily.

**Late Pick-up:** If you are going to be unavoidably delayed, please call the school and inform a staff member of your delay. Parents are considered late when they arrive for pick-up more than 15 minutes past the scheduled pick-up time. At that time, your child will be welcomed into the childcare room, and childcare fees will be assessed. In order to maintain a stable and consistent routine for the children, assist them in their transition into the next program, to provide breaks to our staff, and to maintain appropriate staff to child ratios, we expect families to arrive on time daily.

**Late Fee:** Richland Academy understands that life happens and sometimes you may be running late. Please understand that our staff schedule is based on your child's needs. A late fee of \$10 for every 15 minutes will be assessed for any child that remains at the facility after their scheduled pick up time.

**Authorized Pick-up People:** For the safety of your child, it is Richland Academy's policy to release children only to those individuals previously authorized by parents or guardians on our Release Form. If there is any question regarding custody, current legal documentation regarding custody authorized by both parents is required before the start of the school year. Written permission is required for your child to be released to someone other than the usual, authorized pick-up person. This written permission should include the full name of the person picking up your child, relation to child, make and color of car, and license plate number. You should also include a phone number of where you can be reached at pick-up time to enable staff to contact you should it be necessary. The individual picking up your child may be required to provide our staff with a Photo I.D. Please be sure that this individual is aware of this policy.

## **ATTENDANCE**

Regular attendance contributes to your child's progress and comfortable adjustment to the classroom and childcare environments. Dr. Montessori realized that crucial to young children's sense of self is their need to feel that they "belong" in their culture, family, and peer group. Regular attendance enhances a child's sense of belonging. The child who attends infrequently or irregularly literally "starts over" each time they return to school. Their return to school can be likened to how it feels to join a party already in progress. Things are in full swing and there is awkwardness about joining in when everyone else already appears to be settled in.

Although occasional requests from your child to stay home from school are normal and can be entertained at your discretion, please let a staff person know if your child repeatedly seems unwilling to attend. Fostering a positive attitude toward school and learning is an essential goal of our programs. Therefore, we would like to make every effort to discover the source of any child's uneasiness about coming to school. Parents and teachers can then work together to establish positive feelings about school. Likewise, should your child come home with a negative comment about school, a teacher, or a classmate, please let us know right away so we can address the situation. As it is our policy never to discuss any child in front of him, please communicate your concerns by note or with the privacy of a phone call.

## **BIRTHDAYS**

We welcome the opportunity to celebrate your child's birthday or half birthday at school. The birthday celebration in a Montessori classroom is very special. The birthday child symbolizes their growth by walking our model of the earth around a candle (symbolizing the sun) the number of times the earth has revolved around the sun in their lifetime.

You will be given a birthday bag several days prior to your child's celebration. Included will be a story about your child that we ask your help to complete, as well as several numbered picture frames for your child's photos. This photographic portfolio of your child's growth over the years will be shared with their friends during the celebration. All photos will be returned. Families are also encouraged to donate a book to our library in honor of their child's birthday. Your child's name and the occasion of the donation will be inscribed on the inside front cover.

If your child wishes to share a special birthday snack for the snack table please be aware that cake and cupcakes are not permitted, as they are extremely messy and usually wasted! Large birthday cookies (pizza-sized) can be decorated like a cake, and offer an acceptable alternative. Please also take care to ensure that foods are safe and developmentally appropriate for the children by avoiding foods that contain known allergens and avoiding foods that are choking hazards for the younger children. Information about allergies will be provided by your child's classroom teacher.

In your child's orientation packet you will receive information as to the date of your child's birthday celebration. Birthday photos, special birthday snack, and treat bags need to be dropped off with your child prior to the start of class. Families are welcome into the classroom to observe the celebration. Don't forget your camera or camcorder!

**Birthday Party Invitations:** Invitations to birthday parties may be passed out at school only if all children in the class are being invited. Please utilize our school directory and mail invitations if your child will only be inviting a few friends.

**Birthday Treat Bag:** If you would like to send a treat bag/take home treat, please be sure to provide enough for each student in your child's class. All take home treats need to be marked with the name of each class member. Please refer to your child's most current classroom roster. **ALLERGY ALERT:** Peanut allergy is one of the most common food allergies. Peanuts can cause a severe, potentially fatal, allergic reaction. Parents are asked to ensure that take home treats and other food items shared with your child's classmates do not contain peanuts and peanut products. Please be aware that the staff does not preview the contents of the birthday treat bags. Treat bags are not opened at school and will be sent home for parents to inspect and determine what is safe for their children.

## **BITING**

Richland Academy recognizes that biting is unfortunately not unexpected when toddlers are in group child care. We are always upset when children are bitten in our environment, and we recognize how upsetting biting is for parents. While we feel that biting is never the right thing for toddlers to do, we know that they bite for a variety of reasons. Most of these reasons are not related to behavior problems. Our program does not focus on punishment for biting, but on effective techniques that address the specific reason for the biting. When biting occurs, these are our three main responses:

1. Care and help for the child who was bitten.
2. Help for the child who bit so that he or she learns more appropriate behaviors.
3. Examination of the situation and our program to stop the biting.

Our teachers and staff express strong disapproval of biting. They work to keep children safe and to help the child who bit learn different, more appropriate behavior. We do not use any response that harms a child or is known to be ineffective.

When biting occurs, we give immediate attention and, if necessary, first aid to children who are bitten. We offer to put ice on the bite if the child is willing. If the skin is broken, we clean the wound with soap and water. If children are bitten on the top of their hands and the skin is broken, we recommend they be seen by their health care provider.

When children bite, their parents are informed personally and privately the same day. When there are episodes of ongoing biting, we develop a plan of specific strategies, techniques, and timelines to address it. The parents/guardians of a child who requires a biting plan, will be required to meet with the teachers, will be provided with reading materials about biting, and will be given an assessment to understand the information within the plan.

When children are bitten, their parents are informed personally and given a copy of our incident form. Biting is always documented on our standard incident report form, which is completed and signed by a teacher/director. It must also be signed by the parent. One copy is given to the parents, and the other copy is kept in the incident report file in the office.

We keep both the name of the child who bit and the child who was bitten confidential. This is to avoid labeling and to give our teachers the opportunity to use their time and energy to work on stopping the biting.

Toddler caregivers must complete the training on biting. In addition, we have resources available for staff and parents. We encourage parents to bring their concerns and frustrations directly to their child's teacher.

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Richland Academy is a non-profit organization and must therefore be operated by a Board of Directors. Our Board is made up of volunteer members. The names and phone numbers of our current Board members are published in our School Directory. They can also be obtained in the office upon request. Vacancies on the Board are announced in our newsletter and at R.A.P.O. meetings. To fill a vacancy, a letter of intent from interested persons needs to be forwarded to the Board. The Board selects, by vote, candidates to fill vacancies. Each term of office is 3 years.

## **BOARD MEETINGS**

All regular and special meetings of the Board are open to the public. This preserves the rights of the parents of Richland Academy students to petition the Board. Dates and times of scheduled Board Meetings are published in our monthly newsletter and are announced at R.A.P.O. meetings.

**Petitioner Procedures:** Any person or group wishing to address the Board is required to file with the Board President a written request to be placed on the agenda. This request must be submitted at least eight (8) days prior to the next scheduled meeting. This policy is established to regulate scheduled appearances before the Board. Requests to be placed on the agenda will be acknowledged and either accepted or declined prior to the next scheduled meeting. A request to have a matter placed on the agenda shall contain the following information:

- name of the person(s) making the request
- organization or group, if any, represented
- content of the information to be presented
- specific question to be asked or specific action desired of the Board

If written material is to be disseminated at the meeting, a copy of such material must accompany the request.

If any information, statements, or charges is to be presented that may in anyway be considered derogatory, confidential or defamatory, or of another serious nature, such must be presented in writing, specifically stating the charges.

**Visitors:** Since Board Meetings are open to the public, all visitors are welcome and arrangements will be made for their comfort. A copy of the agenda will be provided for each visitor until the supply of extra copies is depleted. Five (5) copies of the Disbursement Sheet and one (1) copy of the Minutes of the last meeting shall be provided.

The Board President or presiding officer will ascertain, prior to the opening of the meeting, whether any visitor who has not previously made a request to speak on an item on the agenda wishes to bring anything to the attention of the Board. Under most circumstances, the Board can permit a brief statement at an appropriate time by a visitor requesting to be heard. However, the presiding officer may limit the time permitted an individual or group, or insist that they speak only when formally recognized and only when the item is being considered as it appears on the planned agenda. This may seem overly restrictive, but Board meetings are normally long, and it is essential that all items on the agenda be given careful consideration.

After visitors have been heard and the Board has begun its deliberations on an item of business, no comments or questions shall be permitted from the floor. Visitors are often strongly tempted to make suggestions, voice disagreement, or ask for clarification; but the Board cannot carry on an orderly discussion if the deliberative body is suddenly, enlarged to include those who have come to observe.

*The Chairperson has the prerogative to waive the provisions of this section of the policy at his/her discretion.*

## **BOOK CLUBS**

Richland Academy participates in several book and software club programs. Selection catalogues with order forms will be sent home monthly during the school year. Your participation is optional. Your purchases from these clubs enable the school to acquire materials and books for the classroom and our lending library.

## **BREAKFAST**

We realize parents are not always able to provide their child with a nutritious breakfast before they come to school. Richland Academy offers time set aside for the morning meal as part of our Before & After School Childcare Program. Parents are responsible for providing the breakfast foods for their child. Items that could be purchased in bulk and stored at the school include cold or instant cereals, waffles, muffins, fruit, or breakfast bars. Breakfast time is 6:30 - 8:15 a.m.

## **BUSSING**

Kindergarten children are eligible for bussing by their local public school district provided that Richland Academy is within 10 miles from your child's school district boundary. Richland Academy will send a request for bussing form and a copy of our school calendar to the school district upon request from

the parent. Parents are responsible for contacting their particular school district to request service and to arrange bussing details (times and locations of drop-off and pick-up). In the event that your child will not be riding the bus on a particular day, either to or from school, please be sure to contact both Richland Academy and the particular bus company involved.

## **CALENDAR**

Prior to the start of each academic school year, a school calendar will be provided to each family. This calendar outlines the days classes will be held as well as highlighting special school events, closures due to holidays or teacher in-service days, Parent-Teacher conference days and the scheduled dates of closure for the childcare program. Richland Academy reserves the right to close our academic or childcare programs due to inclement weather or childcare program due to lack of pre-registered enrollment on a particular day.

## **CARPOOLS**

Although the school is not responsible for organizing or maintaining carpools, we encourage families to form carpools and will assist in any way we can. Parent Orientation Night, R.A.P.O. Meetings, and the School Directory may assist you in locating families living nearby.

Please inform the staff in writing if you are joining a carpool and if someone other than you will be picking up your child. A schedule of designated drivers along with your written permission for your child to be regularly released to these drivers must be submitted before your child will be released.

The staff suggests that carpool drivers discuss with the children some basic passenger and street safety rules. We encourage parents to follow the Pennsylvania state law requirements for child safety restraint/car seats.

## **CHILDCARE SERVICES IN OUR MONTESSORI HOME ENVIRONMENT**

Richland Academy offers childcare services during the school year from 6:30 a.m. - 8:45 a.m. & 11:45 a.m. - 5:30 p.m., and during the summer from 6:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. The childcare program is open to students enrolled in our academic programs and alumni up to age 6. The Childcare Program offers Before & After School Care, as well as Full-Day Care on non-program days. All childcare programs are based on the principles of developmentally appropriate practice and the theories of Dr. Montessori. The Childcare Program places special emphasis on cooperative play, socialization, dramatization, creative art, and outdoor movement.

All students enrolled in our academic programs must have an application and agreement form completed for our childcare services upon enrollment. We mandate this as a precautionary measure, to ensure that should an emergency arrive and your child requires care, we will be able to provide that care without jeopardizing our licensure.

Childcare schedules must be e-mailed or submitted in writing to the Childcare Director, no later than 12:00 p.m. on the Wednesday prior to each week of service. Childcare schedules that are received after this time will be accepted on a space-available basis and must be approved by the Childcare Director.

Please note that children attending the childcare program from 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. will be expected to nap/rest. Richland Academy will provide all necessary bedding items. They will be laundered regularly by our staff. One comfort item from home will be allowed for infants and toddlers only during nap.

Richland Academy reserves the right to close the childcare program due to inclement weather or lack of pre-registered enrollment on a particular day.

**Payment-** Childcare hours are billed at the end of each month, based on the hours the child is scheduled to attend. Usage is billed at an hourly rate, half-day rate (up to five hours after academic programs) or a full-day rate (more than 5 hours on non-program days). Childcare fees are due by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. Payments received after the 15<sup>th</sup> or payments not made in full will be subjected to a \$25 late fee.

**Cancellation Policy:** Adjustments to the previously submitted childcare schedule must be made prior to 6:00 a.m. on the day of service. Failure to do so will result in a charge for the time previously scheduled.

## **CLOSURES DUE TO INCLIMATE WEATHER OR OTHER EMERGENCIES**

Although Richland Academy makes every effort to remain open for working families, our school maintains the policy not to hold academic classes on bad weather days. When making the decision to close, we take into consideration weather reports as well as the closures of area school districts. Cancellations may be made the night before classes or in the morning hours before school begins. Cancellation information can be found out through the following sources:

WJAC-TV	99.1 FM
FOX 8	101.7 FM
96.5 FM	<a href="http://www.wjactv.com">www.wjactv.com</a>
95.5 FM	Email
92.1 FM	Facebook

Please note that our school will be listed as Richland Academy **NOT** Richland School District.

On days when academic classes are cancelled, every attempt will be made to keep the childcare program open. If there is space available in our childcare program we will accept children on a drop-in basis as space and staffing permits. To check for space availability, call the school at 262-9201 or contact the Childcare Director.

Occasionally, last minutes cancellations due to unforeseen water or electrical problems may occur. In these circumstances, we will alert parents by e-mail if we are forced to cancel classes.

## **CLOTHING/CLOTHING BOXES**

**Indoor Attire:** Please send your child to school in clothing that will allow him/her to fully participate in the kind of physical, and sometimes messy, activities that are so appealing to them. Comfortable play clothes with easy to handle fasteners are most appropriate and allow the child as much independence as possible. Clothing that children will be removing at school (sweaters, jackets, mittens, etc.) must be labeled with your child's name.

**Outdoor Attire:** Outdoor activity is an integral part of all of our programs. Unless it is raining or frigid, you can expect that the children will be invited to explore our outdoor environment each day. With this in mind, please be sure to send your child to school with the appropriate outdoor attire each and every day.

**Footwear:** Children will feel much pride and independence if they can take off and put on their own shoes. Please do not tie your child's shoes in double knots. Slip-ons with closed backs and sneakers with Velcro fasteners are good choices for younger children. **Please, no clogs, flip flops or open backed shoes.** Remember that children will be playing outside most days and fancy shoes can be slippery and become soiled. For your child's safety and comfort, please send him/her to school wearing socks.

**Extra Changes of Clothing:** Families are asked to provide extra changes of clothing to be stored in his/her classroom. These will allow your child to change should water be spilled or some other mishap occur inside or out-of-doors. All items must be labeled with your child's name and placed in a clearly labeled bag. When soiled or wet clothing is sent home, we request that you send replacements the next day. That way they will be available to your child in the event of another accident. Please remember to replace clothing seasonally and as your child changes sizes.

**Infant:** On your child's first day of school, please supply us with three (3) complete changes of clothing. This includes tops, bottoms, socks, and onesies.

**Toddler:** On your child's first day of school, please supply us with two (2) complete changes of clothing. This includes tops, bottoms, socks, and underwear (if applicable).

**Preprimary:** On your child's first day of school, please supply us with one (1) complete change of clothing. This includes underwear, socks, pants, a shirt, and a wash cloth. Children, who regularly attend Before & After School Childcare, should supply us with a total of two (2) sets of extra clothing.

## **COMMUNICATION/MESSAGES**

**Pony Express Folders:** The school will provide each child with a Pony Express Folder at the beginning of the school year. The purpose of this folder is to send important documents back and forth between school and home. The folder both protects these documents and alerts parents and school personnel to the presence of important information. Please keep the folder in your child's tote bag at all times. When placing items in the Pony Express Folder, please put your correspondence in an envelope. Include the following information on the envelope:

To: intended person  
From: your name  
Contents: i.e., tuition, personal, etc.

**Phone Messages:** While classes are in session, a staff person may not be available to answer telephone calls. However, our school answering machine enables the staff to monitor incoming calls. Please leave a message on the machine and one of our staff will respond as soon as possible.

**Newsletter:** To enhance communication with our parents, a school newsletter will be distributed on a regular basis. This newsletter contains relevant information pertaining to school functions as well as parent education and Montessori information.

**Infant/Young Toddler Communication Folders:** Like the Pony Express folders, these folders are to be kept in your child's tote bag and sent to school daily. Infant/Young Toddler Daily Reports will be used as a means of communicating valuable information regarding your child's eating, sleeping, diapering, and/or toileting experiences, overall demeanor, and accomplishments. Each week the Infant/Young Toddler Communication Folder will be stocked with a supply of "Daily Reports" for the week. Prior to arrival you will fill out the section marked Home Report and place it in the folder. This important information will be used by your child's primary care giver in delivering your child's care. The Health Section of the Daily Report will be completed by your child's primary care giver and returned to you each day.

**Older Toddler Daily Reports:** Families of older toddlers will be receiving a simplified Daily Report in which parents will not be required to complete any paperwork prior to your child's arrival. A summary of your child's day will be completed by their teacher and sent home at the end of each day.

**Open Communication:** The teachers at Richland Academy are open to communication with families regarding their child's progress and development. Families wanting to meet with their child's teacher should schedule an appointment ahead of time to avoid disrupting scheduled class activities.

## CONFERENCES

Parent-Teacher conferences are scheduled during the fall and spring of each academic school year for parents of all children enrolled in our academic programs. Conferences are viewed as an opportunity for parents and teachers to exchange information about your child as well as an opportunity for teachers to discuss your child's adjustment and developmental progress.

## CURRICULUM AND PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS

**Infant and Young Toddler:** The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services licenses our Infant & Young Toddler Programs. The infant and young toddler curriculum provides developmentally appropriate experiences for children 6 weeks to 2 years. The curriculum addresses the same areas of general development as the preprimary curriculum (below). It is also guided by the sensitive periods identified by Dr. Montessori during this stage of development:

- weaning
- growth of receptive and expressive language skills
- independence
- order
- repetition
- development of sensory awareness and perception
- coordination of gross & fine motor skills

- experimentation of physical properties of objects
- function of everyday objects
- formation of fundamental concepts

The objectives of the infant and toddler curriculum are to support your child's motor, language, social, emotional, and cognitive development.

**Primary Caregiving:** Starting at infancy, children need deep connections with each person who cares for them. The building of a relationship between a child and caregiver is the foundation of quality care for young children. Selecting a primary caregiver for each child promotes the caring, one-on-one relationships that help children thrive. A baby develops trust as her primary caregiver learns to respond appropriately to her unique temperament, her needs, and her interests by being the one who almost always diapers her, feeds her, puts her to sleep, and communicates with her family. The child's security deepens as her primary caregiver develops a positive relationship with her family and comes to know their values and wishes for their child. This holistic relationship provides the security and trust that enables the child to become a curious and competent explorer in the Montessori environment.

**Continuity of Care:** Continuity of care is key to providing the deep connections that infants and young toddlers need for quality care. In a program that incorporates the concepts of continuity of care, a child has the same primary caregiver until they move into the older toddler program (at age 2). Stability is important for healthy emotional development, which forms the basis for all other areas of development.

**Older Toddler:** The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services licenses our Toddler Program. The Older Toddler curriculum provides developmentally appropriate experiences for children ages 2 and 3 in the areas of Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, and Mathematics. Richland Academy's Older Toddler Program fosters independence in growing, active, and curious children. The classroom is specifically tailored to support the young child's social and emotional development. This program offers an environment which caters specifically to a toddler's critical areas of development:

- personality
- trust
- critical thinking
- problem solving
- separation

Infant Parents may choose from one of our three morning programs:

5 Day: Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday

3 Day: Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday

2 Day: Thursday-Friday

Toddler Parents may choose from one of our two morning programs:

5 Day: Monday-Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday-Friday

3 Day: Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday

All classes meet from 8:45-11:45 a.m.

**Preprimary:** The Pennsylvania Department of Education licenses our Preschool and Kindergarten Programs. The preprimary Montessori program (which includes the Montessori Kindergarten program) provides individualized, developmentally appropriate and age appropriate learning experiences in the areas of Practical Life, Sensorial, Language, Mathematics, Science, Geography, and Cultural Studies.

The objectives of the preprimary curriculum are to provide meaningful opportunities to acquire specific academic skills while also enhancing general development in the areas of:

- cognitive development (concentration, problem solving skills, memory, etc.)
- language development (receptive and expressive)
- physical development (gross and fine motor)
- social development (socialization)
- emotional development (self-esteem, self-confidence, etc.)

Parents may choose either of our two preprimary programs:

5 Day Morning: Monday through Friday (8:45 a.m.-11:45 a.m.)

3 Day Afternoon: Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday (12:30 p.m. -3:30 p.m.)

**Kindergarten:** Our Montessori preprimary curriculum is a comprehensive three-year program using the teaching methods of Dr. Maria Montessori. Since there is a definite continuity to our programs, for optimal benefit we recommend that your child attend through their Kindergarten year. Your child is eligible for our Kindergarten program if s/he is 5 years of age by September 1st.

The Richland Academy Kindergarten program represents the child's final year in the Montessori preprimary environment. Typically, Kindergarten-age children in a Montessori classroom begin to progress to the more abstract academic materials, though their work in the Practical Life and Sensorial Areas remains critical to their overall development. Parents and teachers alike can observe a growth in the kindergartner's confidence, independence, concentration, and coordination. Perhaps above all, your child's need to be part of the social community will stand out during this year. The years before age six are critical years for social development; so expect the staff to be nurturing the strong social tendencies of your kindergartner.

Kindergarten-age children continue to receive individual and small group lessons, and to work freely in the classroom with the auto-educational Montessori materials. The scope and sequence of lessons and materials introduced to the kindergartners will vary year-to-year depending on the developmental needs, interests, and abilities of each child. In addition to using established Montessori materials, students will be given more teacher-directed lessons that will help prepare them for the traditional teaching styles and classroom dynamics that they will encounter when entering public or private first grade programs.

The Kindergarten program is held:

Monday (8:45 a.m.-11:45 a.m.)

Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday (8:45 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.)

Friday (8:45 a.m.-11:45 a.m.)

**Extended Day:** This is not childcare. The Extended Day program provides children 4 years of age and older, with 1 year of classroom experience, an "extended" opportunity to work in the Montessori preprimary classroom. Special themes and projects relating to Geography, Zoology, Botany, Science, and other aspects of Dr. Montessori's notion of a "Cosmic Education" provide the framework for this program. This program is only open to children enrolled in our morning program and is required for Kindergarten students.

The Extended Day program is held Tuesday-Wednesday-Thursday from 11:45 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. and includes a lunch period (parents provide the lunch).

**Special Classes:** Special classes such as art, dance, music, soccer, French, Spanish, etc. may be offered during the school year for children enrolled in our academic program. Information regarding these special classes, as well as fees, will be distributed during the school year when available.

**Summer Programs:** Information and fees regarding our thematic Summer Program are distributed in the spring of each year. Childcare services for enrolled children are available all summer long.

## **CUSTODY POLICY**

In two-parent families, it is assumed that both parents are living at the same address unless we have been notified otherwise. School personnel will, therefore, send home notices, communications, etc. with the child. It is assumed that both parents are communicating regarding the child and that all information is shared by and between the parents. This information includes newsletters, fundraising information, holiday parties, field trip information, conference appointments, student progress reports, and tuition and fee statements. In families experiencing separation of parents or pending divorce, the above information will be sent home with the child to which ever parent currently has care of the child. It is assumed that this information is shared by the parents and between the parents. Since this situation frequently impacts on a child's achievement and interactions at school, parents are asked to inform your child's teacher of this fact so that appropriate support can be given to the child.

If parents are not together, it is the responsibility of the parents to provide all current custody documents to Richland Academy. Richland Academy will abide by the most recent legal document. Unless the document indicates otherwise, school communications will be sent home to the custodial parent. Custodial parents should understand, however, that unless the custody documents specifically limits the non-custodial parent's right to access records, the noncustodial parent has a right to the same access as the custodial parent. We will, unless instructed by a court order, release such records upon request to the non-custodial parent. "Records" include official transcripts, progress reports, health records, referrals for special services, and communications regarding major disciplinary actions. It does not include daily class work and papers, or routine communications sent through the children to the home or residence. In these cases, the custodial parent is asked to cooperate with the school and share this information directly with the non-custodial parent. This avoids time-consuming duplication of services. Furthermore, you should realize that unless restricted by a court order, any non-custodial parent has the right to attend any school activity of their child which includes classroom parties and graduation. Parents should keep each other informed as to these activities to avoid duplication of communications and to allow the school to better attend to the duty of teaching your children. In cases of "joint custody" (shared parenting agreement) entitling both parents access to school personnel and activities, it is assumed that one copy of communications and information will be sent home with the child and that this will be shared by and between the parents.

Regarding parent conferences in all custody situations: It is preferred and will be the general procedure that one conference appointment be scheduled "jointly" if both parents wish to be present. It is assumed that parents are able to set aside differences and to come together on behalf of their child for this time. A joint conference further ensures that both parents are given the same information at the same time, thereby avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

In cases where joint conferences are clearly neither possible nor desirable by all parties involved, alternate arrangements may be discussed with the teacher, subject to the approval of both parents. Every effort will be made to keep communications open with both parents while at the same time avoiding duplication of services and excessive demands on the teacher's time.

Visitation should generally begin at the home of one of the parents and not at school. It is hoped that visitation arrangements would reflect the sensitivity of both parents to the consistency and routines that foster security in a child.

## **DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES**

What does that mean? Developmentally appropriate practices in a school setting are when educators use research-based knowledge about child development (cognitive, physical, emotional, social, and language), in conjunction with the understanding of each individual child's unique strengths, interests, and learning styles, to plan all aspects of the school's programs. Additional information may be obtained by contacting the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) regarding developmentally appropriate practices.

## **DIAPERS/PULL-UPS**

Parents of children enrolled in our Infant and Toddler Programs whose child is not yet potty trained are asked to provide a week's supply of diapers/pull-ups and wipes for your child's needs. Ointments, creams, and powders to prevent diaper rashes are considered "non-prescription medications" and can only be administered with the parent's written consent.

## **DIRECTORY**

Richland Academy issues an annual student directory that lists the names, addresses, email addresses, and phone numbers of all families with children enrolled in the school. Each family will be given a copy of this directory in the fall.

## **DISCIPLINE POLICY**

When we speak of discipline in a Montessori classroom, we are talking about giving children the opportunity to learn how to achieve self-discipline. Discipline for the "long haul" is achieved by teaching, and more importantly, modeling appropriate behavior so that children can begin to guide their own actions.

The staff at Richland Academy primarily utilizes preventive and supportive discipline techniques. We set a calm and peaceful tone in the classroom that fosters a general respect for each child and their work. We model using our words instead of our bodies to solve problems. When children do behave inappropriately, they are privately approached and reminded of the appropriate behavior expected. For the most part, children just need to be reminded. Sometimes they will need guidance, assistance with problem solving strategies, or redirection to find an activity that will absorb their attention fully. Occasionally students may need to sit quietly next to a teacher until they are able to regulate their behavior independently. The closeness of a trusted adult is especially soothing to a child who has lost control of their emotions/behavior. Physically isolating a child from the environment in "time-out" is very rarely used. Corporal punishment and derogatory remarks are never used. Consultation with parents will be requested for any child experiencing repeated behavior control issues. Parents with questions or concerns about discipline should schedule a time to speak with their child's teachers.

## **DONATIONS**

As a non-profit organization, your support in the form of donations is vital to Richland Academy. Such donations enable us to enhance the quality of our programs at the lowest possible cost to you. We ask that you consider your donation efforts as part of your yearly commitment to your child's school environment.

**Paper Products:** All families are asked to contribute one (1) paper product to the school each month. Items of greatest need are: facial tissues, toilet paper, paper towels, and napkins.

**Miscellaneous Items:** Crayons, colored pencils, washable markers, construction paper, watercolors, etc. are all examples of greatly appreciated donation items. You name it and we could probably find a way to recycle it!

**Wish List:** Prior to the December holidays, the staff composes a list of new materials that they would like to purchase for their classrooms. In lieu of personal gifts, please consider utilizing our wish list. Details will be available after Thanksgiving.

**Receipts:** Donation receipts for any donated items will be furnished upon request.

## **EMERGENCY OPERATIONS PLAN**

Richland Academy's Emergency Operations Plan describes the procedures that will be used to provide for the care and well being of the children under our care in the event of an emergency. This plan is meant to address extraordinary circumstances that threaten lives and property. The procedures outlined in this plan constitute those temporary measures that will be taken to provide the best available protection for persons under our care. Important details from the plan are sent home with parents in the orientation packets, and in periodic handouts. The entire plan is available for parents to review in the facility.

## **EXPULSION**

For any child experiencing repeated behavioral issues after the original four week probationary period, a conference will be requested with the child's parents to set forth a disciplinary plan. If after 30 days from the conference date, there is no improvement of the child's behavior, we reserve the right to dismiss the child from our program.

## **FIELD TRIPS**

To extend our learning environment beyond the classroom, Richland Academy typically schedules two school field trips during the school year for our Preprimary students. Depending on the nature of the field trip, all students may be invited. Suggestions for field trips are always welcome. Information concerning field trips is printed in our newsletter or via special hand-outs. Parents provide transportation to and from field trips and chaperone their own children. Signed permission slips are always required for all children attending field trips. Car seats are mandatory for all children under eight (8) years of age.

## **FIRE SAFETY**

For the safety of Richland Academy's staff and children in our care, fire extinguishers and smoke detectors are located throughout our building. Both are inspected annually. All Richland Academy staff members participate in annual fire safety training conducted by fire protection professionals. Fire drills are conducted on a regular basis throughout the school year.

## **FIRST AID**

All Richland Academy staff members receive first aid and CPR training by a professional in the field of first aid. Each year, parents are required to give their permission for our staff to perform first aid and CPR on their child if necessary. A child receiving a minor injury, such as a bump, bruise, scrape, or cut will receive appropriate treatment from a staff member and parents will be notified of the incident at pick-up time. For an injury of a more serious nature, treatment will be given, parents will be notified of the injury by phone, and an Incident Report will be filled out. If emergency medical care is needed for your child, a staff member will contact the parents as soon as possible, in the best interest of the child. If the parent cannot be reached, a staff member shall record in writing the reason emergency care was required and the attempts made to inform the parent. A staff member will accompany the child to the source of emergency care, and will remain with the child until the parent assumes responsibility for the child's care.

## **FUNDRAISERS**

As a nonprofit organization, Richland Academy relies on fundraisers to enhance the quality of our programs. This enables us to keep our tuition and childcare fees competitive. Funds raised throughout the year by our parent organization (R.A.P.O.) are used in the following manner (at the discretion of the Board of Directors):

- purchase new equipment, or replace worn materials
- defray operating expenses
- teacher benefits
- miscellaneous: field trips, expenditures for special events (open house, graduation, holiday parties)

Participation in our fundraisers is the responsibility of parents, Board members, and staff. This is a great opportunity for you to meet your service hour commitment. All funds raised should be turned in to the school in the form of one check made out to Richland Academy.

## **GRIEVANCES**

The Grievance Appeal Procedure at Richland Academy provides a means for resolving problems identified by parents and/or staff. The intent of this procedure is not to question individual decisions, but rather to either:

- clarify school policies or procedures
- identify the need for a new policy or procedure
- change an existing policy or procedure
- provide a forum for resolving an alleged violation of an existing policy or procedure

In all cases, the problem in question must first be discussed with the relevant school personnel. In the case of parent concerns, issues should first be discussed with your child's teacher(s), if it is a class-related issue, or with the Childcare Director, if it is childcare related, or with the Education Director, if it is an

administrative issue. Only if these discussions fail to resolve the issue should the appeal process be invoked. The Chain of Command (and path to be followed for grievances) at Richland Academy is as follows:

**For Childcare:**

Childcare Aide > Assistant Group Supervisor > Group Supervisor > Childcare Director > Montessori Directress > Education Director > Board President > Executive Committee > Full Board.

**For Infant/Toddler Classroom:**

Classroom Assistant > Infant/Toddler Teacher > Montessori Directress > Education Director > Board President > Executive Committee > Full Board.

**For Preprimary Classroom:**

Classroom Assistant > Montessori Directress > Education Director > Board President > Executive Committee > Full Board.

**For Administrative Issues:** *(bookkeeping, fees, billing, registration, etc.)*

Business Manager > Education Director > Board President > Executive Committee > Full Board

Unresolved issues or concerns with classroom staff should be brought to the attention of the Education Director. The Education Director will be responsible for either resolving the issue or bringing the matter before the Board. Parents who wish to directly petition the Richland Academy Board should refer to the section on board meetings.

## **GROUND RULES**

Our classroom and childcare ground rules are posted for parents to review. Please take time to familiarize yourself with the rights and responsibilities your child will share in our environments. As always, any questions regarding ground rules should be brought to our attention.

## **LIBRARY**

Richland Academy maintains a small lending library for preprimary students. The children have regular opportunities to experience the process involved in borrowing books from the library as part of the curriculum. Children will be assisted in selecting and checking out books from our selection of quality children's literature. Please take care of books that come home and help your child remember to return them before the next library day. In the event that a book should become lost or damaged, we ask that you provide us with a \$5.00 donation, which will be used toward the purchase of a new book. The upkeep of our libraries has traditionally been a joint effort between Richland Academy staff and parents. If you would like to assist with our library program, please let a staff member know.

## **LICENSURE**

Richland Academy is licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to function as a Private Academic Preschool and Kindergarten. The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services licenses our Infant, Toddler, and Childcare Programs.

## **LOCKED DOORS**

For the safety of Richland Academy's staff and the children in our care, our building doors remain locked from the outside, at all times. All staff members carry keys to lock and unlock the doors. To notify staff of your presence, please ring the doorbell.

## **LUNCHES**

Children in our care during our lunchtime (noon) should bring a nutritious mid-day meal. This meal may be packed in a brown bag or a lunch box. It will be placed in the refrigerator in our Montessori Home Environment until lunch time. Here are some things to keep in mind when packing a lunch for the day: (1) clearly mark the outside of the bag or lunch box with your child's name; (2) clearly mark the outside of all reusable containers and utensils; (3) pack a lunch that is easy to eat; (4) cut all food into manageable non-chokable bites; (5) pack wholesome and nutritious meals; (6) include two napkins, and any utensils and condiments that your child may need to eat his/her lunch. The Montessori Philosophy encourages children to be as independent as possible with their meal preparation and clean-up.

Please be aware that children are encouraged to eat healthy "growing foods" first before desserts. Children are not forced to finish meals. All uneaten food will be sent home in your child's lunch box to enable parents to see what your child has eaten each day. To avoid allergic reactions, germs, etc. children are not permitted to share their food with one another. Toothbrushes & toothpaste may be sent to school in your child's lunch box for after lunch use.

## **MAINTENANCE, CONFIDENTIALITY, AND RIGHT TO REVIEW CHILD RECORDS**

Records for all children are kept in a locked, fire-safe filing cabinet in the office. By state law, your child's records must be kept for seven (7) years and upon the expiration of 7 years, must be destroyed. All of your child's records are completely confidential. In order for your child's records to be shared with any agency or individual (other than parents, teaching staff, or Education Director) parents or legal guardians must authorize in writing the release of school records. You have the right to review at any time the contents of your child's file (with the exception of teacher notes).

## **MEDICATION ADMINISTRATION**

The Richland Academy staff and Board of Directors recognize parents as having the primary responsibility for the health of their children. Although we strongly recommend that medication be given in the home, we realize that the health of some children requires that they receive medication during school hours. Parents should confer with the child's physician to arrange medication time intervals to avoid school hours whenever possible. When medication absolutely must be given during school hours, the following procedures must be followed:

1. Physician's statement and signature will be required for both prescription and non-prescription medications. (The only exceptions to this rule are sunscreen and over-the-counter diaper rash cream which can be administered with written parental consent.)
2. The physician must complete a written request to the school for administration of medications. The request must include:
  - child's full name
  - name of the medication
  - time of administration
  - purpose of medication
  - medication start and termination dates
  - physician's name & signature
  - dosage amount
  - diagnosis of illness
  - possible side-effects of medication
  - storage information of medication

For your convenience, forms for medication administration are included in your orientation packet. Additional forms can be obtained from the Office.

3. Parents or legal guardians must also sign the written request to administer the prescribed medication. Medications will not be administered without both the parent's and physician's signatures.

4. Except in emergency situations, prescription and non-prescription medications will not be administered to children who are in Richland Academy's care less than 6 hours during a given day. We request that parents arrange dosage times around school hours.

5. All medications must be in the original bottle with the date and name of the student clearly imprinted on the bottle. Non-prescription medications must also be in the original bottle. To prevent accidental overdose, parents must provide an accurate measuring instrument.

6. All students who have been diagnosed with asthma and who require asthma medication must have an Asthma Action Plan. This Asthma Action Plan is available upon request and must be completed and placed in the student's file at the beginning of every school year.

7. All medications with completed formal instructions must be handed directly to a Richland Academy Staff person by the parent. **NEVER SEND MEDICATIONS TO SCHOOL IN YOUR CHILD'S TOTE BAG, LUNCH BOX, OR HAVE YOUR CHILD DELIVER IT.**

Faxes are accepted from your physician. A log of medications administered is maintained by the Staff and kept in the school office. Please keep in mind that these regulations are for the safety and protection of all the students at Richland Academy.

## **THE MONTESSORI METHOD**

The Infant, Toddler, Preprimary, Kindergarten, and Childcare programs at Richland Academy are devoted to the education and nurturing of all children in a harmonious, supportive, child-centered environment. This "prepared environment" utilizes the philosophy of Dr. Montessori, as it has evolved in the last half century, as a basis for its core curriculum. Richland Academy is also strongly committed to developmentally appropriate practices as described by the Position Statements published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Our environments and curriculums are dedicated to enhancing each child's social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development while assisting each child in realizing their unique, immense, inner potential.

The Montessori method is a very complex pedagogy that takes years to learn. Through our monthly newsletters, hand-outs, parent meetings, classroom visitations, conferences with teachers, and by additional reading on this subject, we hope parents will be able to gain a deeper understanding of the Montessori Philosophy. [Tomorrow's Child](#) and [Montessori Life](#) are also wonderful resources for interested parents. Information regarding subscriptions to these magazines can be obtained from the Montessori Directress.

As always, if you ever have any questions about ANYTHING, please don't hesitate to ask. Those of us who are further along are always glad to share with those who are just beginning the journey.

## **MONTESSORI DIRECTRESS**

During your observations of our classrooms, you will come to understand why teachers in Montessori schools are often referred to as "Directresses". The teachers in a Montessori classroom work very differently than traditional teachers. Their role is best defined using R.C. Orem's description from the book [Montessori Today](#):

A Montessori teacher is called a directress because she directs the child to learning. She introduces the child to new materials, observes him, and then stands back to let the child discover and learn himself... Her method of teaching is indirect in that she neither imposes upon the child, as in direct teaching, nor abandons him, as in a non-directive permissive approach... The teacher is an observer and her effectiveness in meeting the needs of each child is directly related to the quality of her observation... She strives to recognize the individual needs of the children and introduce materials and ideas at the right moment for each particular child's self-confidence and growth... She respects, not patronizes; shows, not tells; asks, not dictates; leads, not drives; loves not tolerates.

## **MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT**

The Montessori environment is a carefully prepared "house for children" designed to facilitate maximum independent learning and exploration by the child. The Montessori prepared environment respects and nurtures each child's rhythm of life. It is a calm, ordered space constructed to meet the needs and pace of the child; a living room where the child can investigate, problem solve, experience, and create.

## **OBSERVATIONS, OPEN DOOR POLICY, AND CLASSROOM VISITATIONS**

**Observations:** We encourage parents to observe their child's class as frequently as possible, with the hopes that all parents will observe their child at least once during the school year. In order to allow you to view your child working naturally in the classroom environment we have installed one-way mirrors on our Infant, Toddler, and Preprimary doors. You will be able to observe your child without them being aware of your presence. We ask that parents sign-up ahead of time to avoid over-crowding at the windows.

**Open Door Policy:** Richland Academy maintains an "open door policy" for our Infant, Toddler, and Preprimary programs. This means in essence that parents of currently enrolled students may stop by at any time, without warning, to view their child's program. Please be aware that though we welcome parents into our classrooms at any time, we do ask that you follow pre-established guidelines for visitors that will help to minimize disruptions of classroom routines or unexpected "stranger anxiety" for our children.

## **OFFICE**

Richland Academy's office hours vary. If you need to meet with our Business Manager, please call or email the school to schedule an appointment.

## **ORIENTATION PROGRAM**

**Infant:** Prior to starting school, all new infant families will have the opportunity to speak with your child's Program Director and to discuss how Richland Academy can best meet the needs of your child and family. We ask all new infant/young toddler families to complete your child's Needs and Service Plan (included in the Orientation Packet) as soon as possible. A conference may be requested. Separation schedules for older infants will be arranged on an as-needed basis.

**Toddler:** The purpose of our toddler separation schedule is to orient our new toddlers to their environment. The schedule also gives the parents an opportunity to get to know us, while we get to know you. The first weeks' toddler separation schedule will be included in the orientation packet. If needed, based on the child's readiness to separate, additional scheduling will be arranged.

**Preprimary:** The purpose of the preprimary orientation program is to establish a trusting relationship between teachers and child. Your child will be introduced to the school's ground rules and will discover what is expected of him. Your child will be introduced to the work cycle, how to hang up his coat, wash his hands in preparation for snack, serve his own drink and snack, crumb the table, wash his dishes, and sweep the floor. He will be able to name most of the

children and the teachers. The first weeks' preprimary orientation schedule will be included in the orientation packet.

## **PHYSICAL EXAMS**

All children attending any of Richland Academy's programs must have an annual physical exam and supply the school with proof of immunization. Physical forms are distributed prior to enrollment and must be returned to the school within 5 days of your child's start date. Should families be unable to obtain an appointment with their physician within that time frame, please submit a letter to the Director supplying the name of the physician and the appointment date of the physical. Failure to supply the school with immunization records and proof of physical exam within 30 days from date of enrollment will result in immediate withdrawal of student until records are submitted.

## **R.A.P.O. (Richland Academy Parent Organization)**

Richland Academy offers many opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's school. The goals of our school could not be achieved without the combined efforts of the parents who volunteer their time and talents toward the success and improved quality of our programs.

All parents are considered members of the Richland Academy Parent Organization (R.A.P.O.). The purpose of this parent group is to enhance the educational experiences of our children through committees of parent volunteers. A volunteer parent coordinator, who works closely with parent committees, classroom teachers, the Montessori Directress, the Education Director, and the Board, runs R.A.P.O. The R.A.P.O. coordinator is not, however, a mediator between parents and staff or parents and the Board. Parents with concerns should refer to the section on grievances.

R.A.P.O. typically holds meetings every month. This is a time for committee meetings, fundraising "brainstorms", and socialization among parents. Guest speakers may also be invited to lecture on parenting issues, early childhood education, child safety, and child development. Richland Academy's staff members are also regular guests at R.A.P.O. meetings, providing presentations on the Montessori Method, Montessori materials, child development, etc.

You will receive a volunteer sheet upon enrollment requesting your participation in R.A.P.O. Please be aware that many of the ways you could become involved in your child's school are NOT time consuming. Thank you in advance for your participation.

## **SERVICE HOURS**

Richland Academy believes that the education of our students is a partnership with our families. Service hours are an opportunity for each family to help us accomplish our common goals in providing a solid Montessori education, and a healthy, safe and attractive atmosphere in which to learn and play.

Each family with a student enrolled at Richland Academy is required to complete ten (10) service hours per school year. Families will find many opportunities to fulfill service hours in all areas of school life. Opportunities include involvement in the Richland Academy Parent Organization, assisting with school maintenance projects, volunteering at school functions, participating in fundraisers, assisting teachers with classroom projects both in and out of the classroom, as well as many other opportunities. These opportunities will be communicated periodically through e-mails and in the Richland Academy newsletter.

In lieu of performing service hours, a family may choose to pay for the hours and not to participate. The yearly commitment will be \$250 (\$25 per hour).

Unfulfilled service hours will begin being billed at the rate of two per month (\$50) in December of each school year.

## **SHARING**

In a Montessori environment in most instances, children are not asked or forced to share their work or activities. Since parents often misunderstand this sharing policy, it is important to read this section about sharing.

Dr. Montessori felt that a child who was forced to share before the egocentricity natural to childhood made sharing meaningful (and rewarding), would come to have negative ideas about sharing in general. She believed that a child whose rights were respected, and who was encouraged to be kind and respectful of the rights of others, would grow into a person who could freely give of himself and extend this kindness to others. Children would come to comprehend sharing "naturally" and would begin to choose to share of their own volition. The child would come to view sharing as an opportunity to enhance their own play experiences and a way to extend enjoyment to others.

The experiences of thousands of Montessorians have verified the validity of Dr. Montessori's ideas about sharing. Sharing is a developmental milestone. Without rules demanding that children share, parents might expect not to see much sharing amongst the children. Quite the contrary is true. Children in Montessori environments tend to be more respectful of the rights of others and to share with a genuine spirit of camaraderie.

In our classrooms, if a child is working with a piece of equipment, his solitude and right to work without interruption is supremely respected. Children may invite others to join their work, but no child has the right to demand that another child share an activity (unless an activity is designated as "group work"). If a child wants to use an activity, and the current user wishes to continue to work alone, then the child waits until the activity is returned to the shelf. In the Toddler environment, since toddlers typically are not developmentally able to "delay gratification", staff intervene to offer duplicate or similar alternative choices when children do not wish to share self-chosen activities.

## **SICK POLICY**

Your child needs to be well to be able to participate actively in our programs. Due to state mandated child/staff ratios, we cannot accommodate requests for children to stay indoors due

to recent illnesses. Such requests, to be accommodated, would require that the entire class miss opportunities to play outside.

In a group situation, there is bound to be a certain amount of contagious illness. But, we feel strongly that the spread of illness can be minimized if all parents are conscientious about keeping sick children at home. Your child may not attend school or childcare if he or she has any of the following symptoms:

- fever above normal within the last 24 hours
- nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- hacking or persistent cough
- dizziness or weakness
- earache or other acute pain
- conjunctivitis or "pink eye"
- persistent green or yellow nasal drainage or sputum
- contagious rashes

In all instances of illness, please be sure to ask your physician about the communicability of your child's illness. Get a definite opinion as to when he will be able to return to school. In some instances (e.g. pink eye), the school may require a physician's note affirming that your child is no longer infectious.

Should your child develop symptoms during school hours, we will request that you make arrangements for your child to be picked up promptly.

## **SLIPPERS**

The staff and children at Richland Academy are asked to wear slippers in our classrooms. The Montessori method recognizes the child's need for quiet and order in the classroom to allow the greatest opportunity to do concentrated work. Since the children work and play on the floor, the use of slippers helps to keep our rugs clean and sanitary. When purchasing slippers, please choose a style with a back and a rubber or plastic sole. Other varieties are too slippery or can easily get wet. Also, please refrain from purchasing slippers with no backs or huge cartoon heads attached. These tend to cause tripping. A plain, comfortable slipper is recommended. Crocs are a popular choice. Please label the bottoms of your child's slippers with a permanent marker.

**Infants and Young Toddlers:** Non-mobile infants are not required to wear slippers, but should wear socks to school each day. As these children learn to walk, socks or slippers with non-skid bottoms are recommended.

## **SNACK PROGRAM**

**Infant:** Families of infants who require bottles should supply enough bottles, breast milk or formula and water for mixing (if applicable) to last throughout the child's entire day at school. It is recommended that families send to school a week's worth of feeding supplies. All infant feeding supplies should be kept in their original packaging. Prior to the start of school, infant parents will indicate how their child's bottles should be prepared on the *Needs and Service Plan*.

**Infant and Young Toddler:** Families of infants and young toddlers who eat solid food should provide snacks for their children. Prior to arrival each day, families should indicate on the Infant/Toddler Daily Report what they intend for their child to have for snack. It is suggested that families send enough snack items for your child's day. All snacks should be kept in their original packaging in order to enable the staff to screen foods for possible allergens.

**Older Toddler and Preprimary:** We would like the children to enjoy regular, healthy snacks and beverages while in our care. We request parent participation in helping us to achieve this goal.

Our snack program makes use of a yearly snack calendar in which each child is asked to bring enough snack and snack-related items for a several day period, one time during the school year. A shopping list will be distributed several days prior to your snack date and will include the snacks or special items suggested, the quantity required, and the date that they should be brought to school.

Birthday snacks will be served during snack time on the celebration day. Birthday snacks must be dropped off prior to the start of class. All snacks must come in their original packaging in order to enable the staff to screen foods for possible allergens.

## **TAX IDENTIFICATION NUMBER**

The tax identification number for Richland Academy is 25-1442401. Tax statements will be sent to parents in January for the previous calendar year.

## **TEACHER CHANGE**

At Richland Academy Montessori, our teachers are highly qualified and experienced in the Montessori tradition of educating children. Based on the number of children enrolled at each level of education, there may be a need for more than one classroom; each classroom is led by a Montessori-educated teacher. While we will make every effort to accommodate parent request for certain teachers prior to the beginning of the school year, we are unable to honor requests for teacher/classroom changes once the school year begins. Classroom assignments are based on a number of factors including each child's experience with Montessori, their age, and gender. Every effort is made to assure an equal number of children in each classroom in order to best devote teacher direction to all children. Therefore, changing teachers/classrooms once the school year has begun may disrupt this balance.

If the parent feels there is a serious reason for a change, you are encouraged to speak first with your child's teacher. If further discussion is necessary, a request can be submitted in writing to the Richland Academy Board of Directors. Above all, we strive to put the children's educational needs first.

## **TOTE BAGS**

Each child must have a Richland Academy tote bag. Tote bags should include your child's Pony Express Folder, a storybook, and a comb. Please do not place additional items in your child's tote bag since it needs to be roomy enough to transport your child's art work, reading folder, soiled clothes, etc. Tote bags should be checked and emptied daily.

## TOYS

We ask that children not bring toys or items from home to school. These toys are often a source of conflict, competition, and distraction from the carefully prepared environment. Please explain to your child that some things simply belong at home. Children who need that special something from home to ease the transition to school will be asked to keep the item in the car. We appreciate your help in encouraging your child to respect this rule. Special mementos, treasures, and creatures your child would like to share with his classmates may be brought to school when prior arrangements have been made with the teaching staff.

## TUITION/ FINANCIAL AGREEMENTS

Since Richland Academy is a nonprofit organization, all operating expenses come out of tuition monies and collected childcare fees. Yearly tuition and childcare fees are determined through careful assessment of the school's budgetary needs. Budgets are available for review upon request. No profit and very little margin of error are incorporated into the budget. For this reason, it is imperative that your tuition payments be made promptly and in the correct, full amount. Timely payments of your tuition allow us to pay our bills promptly and meet our payroll.

The Montessori programs are tuition-based programs. Tuition for these programs pays for your child's participation in our academic program only. Childcare fees are assessed separately. Once you have enrolled your child in our academic programs, we reserve a space for your child for the entire school year. If for any reason you withdraw your child during the school year, you will be held responsible for the remaining tuition owed for the full school year (as per the Tuition Agreement form). The exception is made for withdrawals during the probationary period (four weeks from date of enrollment), or should families relocate their primary residence to an area outside a 45-minute commute to the school. In all instances of withdrawal, registration fees and tuition deposits are non-refundable. See Withdrawal Policy for more information.

**Tuition Payments:** Yearly tuition is divided into 10 (ten) monthly installments. In July you will receive information regarding your monthly tuition payment. This monthly payment does not vary, therefore **we do not send monthly tuition reminders**. Your first tuition payment is due August 1st and the final tuition payment is due May 1st. Please be reminded that tuition fees are due on or before the 1<sup>st</sup> of each month. In order to avoid a \$25 late fee your entire monthly payment must be received before the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month. Late fees are compounded monthly.

**Termination of Services:** All Richland Academy parents and guardians are asked to keep their payments current and paid in the month that they are incurred. Richland Academy depends on timely payments for childcare and educational services to pay its monthly expenses and does not have adequate financial reserves to extend credit to Richland Academy parents or guardians. Therefore, it is extremely important that payments for child care and educational services be received as it is due and not allowed to accrue in any manner.

Three letters will be sent out once an outstanding balance of \$100 accrues. If, after the second letter, no payment has been received and/or no payment plan has been arranged with the Business Manager, a third and final letter will be sent. Richland Academy will then continue its efforts to collect outstanding balances up to and including legal action.

Richland Academy reserves the right to suspend services two business days from the date of the third letter and will not be able to accept your child for childcare or educational services until the balance is paid in full.

Please keep your payments current and paid in the month they are due!

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Thank you to current and future Richland Academy volunteers. To maintain a safe and healthy environment, background clearances are now mandatory for all volunteers who will be interacting with Richland Academy students. If you want to volunteer at a class party, help in the classroom or library, read a story, share a talent, or interact with students in any other way, you are required to submit a copy of the PA Criminal Background Certification and the Child Abuse History Certification. These volunteer clearances are now available free of charge.

Child Abuse Clearance - <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>  
State Police Clearance - <https://epatch.state.pa.us/>

Once on file, these clearances will be valid for 5 years.

## **WITHDRAWAL POLICY**

At the time you registered your child in our Infant, Toddler, Preprimary or Kindergarten programs, the school reserved a space for your child for the entire school year. Your full tuition was calculated into our operational budget. On the tuition agreement form it states: *"Please be aware that the tuition fee is in no way lessened by the absence or departure of a student during the September to May school year."* Our financial policy is that if for any reason you withdraw your child from the school, you will be held responsible for the remaining tuition owed for the full school year as per the Tuition Agreement Form. Exceptions are made for withdrawals during the four week probationary period and for withdrawals due to relocation of primary residency. Withdrawals for these reasons must be made in writing.

- **Withdrawals Due To Relocation:** When families relocate residency to an area outside a 45-minute commute to school, notice must be given to the school a minimum of two weeks prior to the date of withdrawal. Families will remain responsible for tuition during the notice period.
- **Withdrawals Due To Illness:** A medical withdrawal request can be made to the Board of Directors when an extraordinary circumstance, such as a serious illness or injury, prevents the student from continuing classes for the remainder of the year. Documentation from a doctor and approval from the Board of Directors is required in order to be released from further tuition payments.
- **Withdrawals During Probationary Period:** The first four weeks of enrollment constitutes the "probationary period." During the probationary period, staff and parents evaluate the child's readiness for our Montessori environment. If the staff and/or parents agree that the child is not ready, s/he may be withdrawn and the parents are released from further tuition payments.

## **WORK**

In the Montessori classrooms, any activity a child chooses is referred to as his or her "work." As long as the child is engaged in purposeful activity (meaning an activity requiring the effort of the mind and body working together), his activity is considered his "work." Please keep in mind the difference between the purposes adults see in "work" and a child's purposes. Adults "work" to get the job done, preferably in the quickest, most efficient way. A child, on the other hand, "works" for entirely different reasons. The child pursues activities for the pleasure of the process, not for the end result or the product. Dr. Montessori wrote that the adult works to perfect the environment while the child works to perfect herself. In a Montessori classroom, adults admire how the children concentrate during their work and how carefully they execute a task. We notice their ability to work independently and to recall the series of steps necessary to complete an activity. We commend their efforts, their learning strategies, their creativity and inventive solutions. In short, all the processes that will provide a solid foundation for future learning.

In a Montessori classroom, we do not point out errors or mistakes the children have made in their work. To do so, would negate the value of the "process" and may injure a child's self-esteem and self-determination. Errors give us valuable information about a child's level of understanding, as well as important clues regarding thinking strategies. The child will have many opportunities to be exposed to the "proper" way/answer during their years in our classroom. We would appreciate your cooperation with papers that may come home with errors. The primary focus is the value of effort and the emerging critical thinking skills and thought processes.

Please be aware that the majority of the materials in a Montessori classroom are concrete, hands-on, sensorial-based manipulatives. Since there is very little "paper & pencil" work in a primary classroom, please don't ask your child for proof of his day's work. A child can work very hard at school only to have the value of this hard work negated by the parent's question: "Do you have any papers for me?" Because of such "parent pressure" for proof of work, many Montessori schools do not permit the children to take their papers home. Montessori children are encouraged to work for their own self-satisfaction and not for the praise of their parents or teachers. If you are curious about what your child is doing at school, please feel free to observe, visit the classroom, or request a conference with your child's teacher.