

FAMILY HANDBOOK

2022/2023

ESCUELA DEL SOL MONTESSORI



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MISSION

To Inspire a Passion for Life-Long Learning

VISION

Escuela del Sol is an educational community rooted in the understanding of the interdependence of all life. We value diversity and encourage students of all ages to discover the role each plays in contributing to community. A not-for-profit organization, Escuela is comprised of multiple elements, including Montessori Early Childhood, Elementary and Junior High classrooms, and the Harwood Art Center, a community outreach program based in arts education and service.

As the school's facilities and landscapes are renovated and improved, the campus is becoming an urban oasis, celebrating our history and future in an environment specially prepared to give voice to the core values embraced and promoted by our community. This includes areas for study, exploration, rest and reflection; areas appropriate in size and scope for young people and the adults who are there to provide guidance and learn alongside the children. The campus has areas for play, for gardening and urban farming, classrooms and studios, areas indoors and out to support the programs of both the school and its outreach through The Harwood Art Center.

The campus extends from Mountain Rd. on the north to Granite St. on the south, goes east from Seventh St. to Sixth St. on the west. Property acquisition to complete the campus and meet program needs is a goal. Specific renovation and building details were created during the recent Master Planning process to address programming goals. The process included representatives of all stakeholders of the organization.

All families are encouraged to join the wider community in exploring the organization's two web sites in order to remain up to date with the organization and its programs. Please visit www.escueladelsol.org and www.harwoodartcenter.org frequently.

OUR WORK & CORE VALUES

Escuela del Sol Montessori is an educational community rooted in the understanding of the interdependence of all life; we encourage students of all ages to discover the role each plays in contributing to the community. A not-for-profit organization, Escuela administers multiple elements including Montessori Early Childhood, Elementary and Junior High classrooms, as well as The Harwood Art Center, our community outreach program based in arts education and service.

Philosophy

We recognize that every person is unique and that individual differences, when supported in a positive way, will allow each person to make a positive contribution to the community. That community can be a small group of friends, a classroom, a school, the world. Each classroom provides a learning environment that encourages independence, confidence, and cooperation while enabling each child to grow and learn at their own pace.

Children and adults interact with their environment, peers and each other in a way that enables the learning process to occur in an optimal way through intellectual, social, and emotional support. This understanding provides the basis for all our educational programming, whether in Montessori classrooms or in an adult art class at The Harwood. Community service and outreach is an integral part of the program and philosophy here at Escuela del Sol and its Harwood Art Center.

Anti-Bias Anti-Racist • Building Awareness

Escuela del Sol Montessori recognizes that biases are inherent in our world. These can include biases for or against racial/ethnic backgrounds, culture, language, gender expression, sexual orientation, family structure, cognitive or physical ability, economic class, and religion. We recognize that every person—staff, parent, child—experiences privilege, oppression and marginalization differently.

We take an informed, dynamic approach to education that works to identify and respond to discriminatory policies and practices in education. Our school community is founded upon Dr. Montessori's philosophy that education is the catalyst to peace. It is our role as members of this community to mindfully model and guide children to their roles in creating social justice and equity, providing educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners.

In affecting social change, Escuela del Sol Montessori will work with children in a safe and supportive environment where they can communicate and investigate their individual interests and passions together in their community. It is our duty as educators to prepare our staff and environment to provide an inclusive space for every member of our community. To that end, Escuela is committed to:

- Taking a proactive approach to eliminating biases and/or racism in our environment
- Providing opportunities for people to explore and celebrate each other's differences and similarities
- Building honor and respect for Humanity's differences, recognize bias, and to begin to learn how and why to speak up for what is right.
- Our staff will engage in investigations of our own identity through anti-bias, anti-racist training and continuous reflection
- By providing guidance on equity, we hope to encourage socially aware and responsible citizens in their communities: locally, nationally, and globally.

Montessori education, while providing many academic opportunities also specifically teaches how to exist in a rich and varied social group that addresses race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, physical & learning abilities, and economic class; purposefully encouraging and empowering children to take an active, problem-solving approach to explore and create strategies for improving social conditions of their communities. We know that this work is never done and it will continue with each passing school year, but it needs to be done as a community of people lifting one another up in hopes of new intellectual, emotional, and social development. At Escuela del Sol Montessori we are lifelong learners.

HISTORY

Escuela del Sol Montessori was founded in 1968. Families of the school who volunteered their time and efforts formed a Board of Trustees, which ran the school for its first decade. In 1980 the building in the University area that housed the school was sold. A new home was found near Old Town. The buildings were renovated and a new program was started with Ms. Friedje vanGils as Escuela's first Head of School.

A second campus at 1114 7th Street N.W. was added in 1986 to accommodate a new Toddler program and Elementary School. With community support and careful planning, Escuela was able to purchase the property in January 1997. Realizing a long-term goal, Escuela purchased an adjacent property in 1999 to build a new Primary building and consolidate the school on one campus. August 2001 saw the completion of the new classroom building designed by architect Eileen Devereux.

Escuela's facilities include the historic red brick building known as The Harwood Art Center. In 1991 this art center was added to the repertoire of Escuela's educational programs to further serve the community. Escuela del Sol received the 1995 Bravos! award from the Albuquerque Arts Alliance for the school's support of the arts.

As we celebrate many years of service, while setting goals for a sustainable organization, Escuela del Sol Montessori faces the future with ensured stability, growing recognition for its outstanding programs, and widespread community support.



THE HARWOOD ART CENTER

Since 1991 Escuela del Sol has operated a community outreach program known as The Harwood Art Center. The building that houses this program was The Harwood Girls' School, founded in 1925; therefore, the name of our art center.

Harwood (as it's commonly known) is a creative center for community and the arts, established to build a sustainable and vibrant local, statewide and regional community by using the arts as a catalyst for personal empowerment, cultural enrichment and social change.

Through Harwood, the organization serves people of all ages from the diverse communities of New Mexico. Harwood initiates opportunities for people to enrich their lives by experiencing and/or creating visual, performing, and literary arts. The Art Center provides studio, performance, and gallery facilities and offers programs, events, exhibitions, lectures, classes, and workshops for students and artists of all ages and skill levels. Through its Harwood Art Center program, Escuela del Sol fosters community involvement, promotes the arts, encourages advocacy, and provides opportunities for life-long learning.

Membership

Members of the Escuela del Sol community, that is, families enrolled in the school, have a family membership to the Harwood Art Center. Members receive newsletters, invitations to special events, and special rates on Harwood classes. Several local businesses also provide discounts on their goods and services for Harwood members. For more information, please call the Associate Director of Engagement at 505-242-6367.

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS & PROCEDURES

Escuela del Sol does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, creed, ethnic or national origin, religion, ability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression in its admission policy, tuition assistance program, or other educational policies.

Please refer to the website www.escueladelsol.org for detailed information, online forms and scheduling opportunities to visit the school. All information obtained in the admission process is confidential and will be used only in the admission process. This information will not be available to the candidate, parents, or anyone outside the school's admission office.

Applicants are given priority in the following order:

1. Families interested in continuing through Jr. High, the culmination of our program
2. Siblings of students continuing at Escuela del Sol Montessori
3. Children of Escuela alumni
4. All other qualified applicants

The school seeks to create classroom communities balanced by gender and age. In general, the school prefers to admit children at age three or younger. Older students will be considered on an individual basis, as space allows, with preference given to students with previous Montessori experience. Please note: if a family withdraws a child before the end of Primary, that decision may affect admission of younger siblings.

Tuition Assistance

All current and prospective Escuela del Sol families are eligible to apply for tuition assistance. The amount of assistance is limited and varies from year to year. Please find information and a link to the tuition assistance application at www.escueladelsol.org.

Priorities:

1. Continue support for families currently receiving assistance
2. Provide funds that enable families already enrolled in the school to stay with the school
3. Consider all other requests

Within this context, preference is given in the distribution of tuition assistance to families committed to staying through the entire educational program of the school.

Classroom Placement

At each level, children are clustered in mixed-age learning communities for a multi-year period of time. These communities provide a number of advantages not found in conventional schools. Children work with others who are older and younger than themselves. Older students serve as role models and tutors for the younger students, and in the process they gain confidence in their own abilities and self-esteem regarding their skill level and expertise. The younger ones watch the older ones, and in the process gain a clear vision of what's expected of them, while having the benefit of working with and learning from their peers as well as the guide. Each community is a direct preparation for life in the family and in the workplace.

In conventional school settings, a child's placement is often determined randomly, or according to administrative needs. Escuela del Sol is not an adult-centered educational system; it is child-centered. When students are moving from one program into another, their gifts and challenges are recognized; students are placed in a learning community that our faculty determines as best for that individual.

Administration and faculty work hard to make sure that each child is placed in an environment where their needs will be met. If parents or guardians have particular concerns about their child's learning style during a time of transition, we invite them to meet with the Level Directors to discuss those concerns.

SCHOOL POLICIES* & RECORDS REQUIRED

*Reference the current Covid Operating Plan for specific pandemic-related information.

Immunization Policy

Enrollment at Escuela del Sol is contingent upon Escuela receiving satisfactory evidence that a student is “fully immunized”, meaning the student is in compliance with the immunization requirements of the laws and regulations of the State of New Mexico. Exemptions, including approved accommodations, may be sought directly from the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH). For students, “fully immunized” means, at a minimum, that the student has received the immunizations required by state law and regulation for attendance at public schools. In addition, Escuela del Sol may add immunizations required for “full immunization” in consultation with the school’s medical advisers.

Escuela del Sol reserves the right to decline admission or re-enrollment to any child who is not fully immunized and is not subject to an exemption approved by the NMDOH. Requests for a temporary waiver of immunization requirements in order to seek an exemption from NMDOH may be submitted to the Executive Director who has full discretion to approve or deny the same.

Escuela del Sol reserves the right, during outbreaks of illness, to exclude from school any child who is not fully immunized. In such cases, there will be no refund or adjustment of tuition paid or owed to Escuela.

All employees of Escuela del Sol are required to be fully immunized, per the above description.

Enrollment, Tuition and Fees

These contracts are completed online; after admission, parents or guardians are given a link to the enrollment contract. Please read the enrollment contract carefully as you fill it out.

Annual Tuition / Fee schedules are posted on the school’s website: www.escueladelcsol.org. Tuition-related questions should be addressed to Escuela’s Business Manager, Jodie Martinez (jodie@edelsol.org).

For the Elementary and Jr. High: Note that signer(s) of the enrollment contract are obligated to pay the full school year’s tuition, in its entirety, if a student is withdrawn after July 1 previous to the start of a school year.

For Early Childhood (Toddler and Primary): Signer(s) of the enrollment contract are obligated to pay the full school year tuition, in its entirety, if the student is withdrawn after January 1 of the school year. In addition, one month’s notice, in writing, is required prior to withdrawal.

Records Required

An Enrollment Contract, Student Admission Record, Health Records (that include immunizations, allergies, and/or illnesses the school should be aware of), emergency contact numbers, permission for emergency care and transportation, as well as the child’s doctor’s name and number are all required by the State of New Mexico. This information must be kept updated. Parents should notify the school of any changes in these records (e.g., address, email and phone changes). For children whose parents are divorced or in any other situation where custody may be an issue, clear direction regarding matters of custody must be filed with the school office and the classroom guide.

Illness* / Injury

*Reference the current Covid Operating Plan for specific pandemic-related information.

If your child has suffered a severe injury or is seriously ill, we will call 911. The emergency system transports all critically injured people and most seriously ill children to UNM Hospital, according to a citywide protocol. We will contact you after we call 911.

If your child is less severely injured, or ill, we will attempt to contact you first. However, we will not delay needed care to do so, and will call your pediatrician and/or emergency contacts if we think this is appropriate.

Consent: Your permission is needed before your child can be treated unless a true emergency exists. Make sure the consent statement found on your child's Student Admission Record is signed and dated by a parent or legal guardian.

Please help minimize the spread of illness among our students. If your child has any infectious illness (cold or fever, chicken pox, diarrhea, strep throat, conjunctivitis, etc.) keep them home and contact the office so we can alert our other parents. Children who are sick should not be at school. If a child is not well enough to play outdoors and interact actively with other children, the child is too sick to come to school.

A child at school who is not feeling well or who has a contagious rash or ailment such as "pink eye" will be sent home. When a child becomes ill at school, parents will be called. If parents cannot be reached, the family's emergency contacts will be called to pick up the child.

If your child is going to be absent or is ill, please submit a [Student Absence Form](#) before 9 a.m.

The following is a list of symptoms to guide you in deciding whether your child should be sent to school. Do not send your child to school on days when any of the following symptoms are present or were present the night before:

Fever (temperature over 100.4 °F)

Rash

Persistent cough

Discharge of discolored or profuse amounts of mucus from the nose

Earache

Diarrhea

Impetigo

Pink eye

Vomiting

Sore throat

Live head lice or nits

Medication

Our staff can only administer medication with written permission from a parent or legal guardian. Medication must be given to the child's guide and must be in the original container labeled with the child's name, name of medication, dosage, and time it is to be given. Only prescribed medications such as antibiotics and medications for chronic problems such as asthma will be given, and only when the appropriate form is on file. Medical authorization forms are available from the office.

Make sure that the office and the teachers are aware of any health conditions such as special diets, allergies, etc., your child may have. Contact the office to initiate or update an Allergy Action Plan.

NO Nuts

Escuela del Sol is a nut-free campus; this includes not only peanuts but all tree nuts as well (cashews, pistachios, almonds, walnuts, pecans, macadamias, piñon/pine nuts, hazelnuts, etc.) We ask that you do not send snacks OR lunches that contain any form of nut. (Please remember that every granola bar, whether the ingredient list includes nuts or not, most likely contains trace amounts due to shared processing/packaging facilities.) We understand that for some families nuts are a staple and a great source of protein, but for others exposure to tree nuts is, quite frankly, a matter of life or death. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in this matter.

Suspected Child Abuse/Neglect

Faculty and staff are trained to recognize the indicators of child abuse/neglect. If a staff member suspects child abuse/neglect this will be noted in writing, the Executive Director alerted, and the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) notified, if warranted. If child abuse, in our opinion, may have occurred, it is our legal responsibility to notify ECECD.

Emergency Procedures

Escuela's Emergency Procedures, Safety Policies, and Disaster Preparedness Plan are available in the school office.

Weapons Policy

Escuela del Sol Montessori, Inc., prohibits anyone from carrying a handgun, firearm, or weapon of any kind onto its property. This ban is consistent with NMSA Section 30-7-2.1, as amended, except that this policy does not allow any exception for firearms carried by persons over the age of 19 on school premises, in a private automobile, or other private means of conveyance.

This policy applies to all school and art center partners and all persons who are on the premises of Escuela Del Sol or the Harwood Art Center for any reasons, except as noted below. The only exceptions to this policy are police officers and/or security guards who bring weapons on campus to carry out their duties as in the case of emergencies or illegal intrusions.

Prohibited weapons include any form of weapon or explosive restricted under local, state or federal regulation including all firearms, illegal knives or other weapons covered by the law. "School property" covered by this policy includes, without limitation, all buildings and grounds owned or leased by Escuela del Sol Montessori, Inc.

PROCEDURAL INFORMATION* for ALL AGES

*Reference the current Covid Operating Plan for specific pandemic-related information.

Orientation

At the beginning of the year, Escuela will provide orientation for all parents. Additionally, Toddler Community faculty will arrange a home visit to first respectfully meet these youngest members of our community within their comfort zones, before they arrive at school. Orientation, whether in writing, on campus or personal visit, is essential for helping your child get off to a good start. Orientation will cover both practical information and the Montessori approach; everything from drop-off to lunches, from developmental considerations to academic preparation will be covered. If you have any questions that are not answered, please do not hesitate to contact the school office for more information.

Arrival, Dismissal and Parking

Escuela del Sol is open Monday thru Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Arrival for the regular school day begins at 8:00 and classes start promptly at 8:30 a.m. Children should not arrive earlier than 8:00 unless signed up for extended care. All children should be picked up within 10 minutes of the end of their session. Anyone picking up his/her child more than 10 minutes late will be charged for childcare at the rate of \$12.00 per hour, for a minimum of one hour. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of being on time and of making sure your child's guides know your plans. Whenever there is a change in the student's transportation plans or pick-up time, please let guides and the office know.

Children will be released only to persons known to the staff and to those for whom we have written permission on file. Unless Escuela is notified in advance, the child will not be released. Please be sure a staff member is aware of your child's arrival and departure from school. Park in our paved south parking

lot (entering from Granite Street, exiting onto 7th Street). NEVER park in the fire lane. Please use extreme caution in the parking lot.

Extended Care

If you need to leave your child at Escuela for extended hours, please notify the office at least 24 hours in advance. The charge for drop-in extended care is noted in the applicable Tuition and Fee Schedule.

Lunch

Lunch can be purchased from The Harwood Cafe. For questions regarding price and menu, please visit the lunch page on the school website: <http://www.escueladelosol.org/hot-lunch-program/>

If your child brings lunch from home: Please be aware that we have very limited refrigerator space and time to microwave. Please use ice packs when possible and send hot foods in thermoses. Mark lunches with the child's name. It is not necessary to provide a drink; the school will provide drinks for the children. Please do NOT pack sodas and other high-sugar items in your child's lunch.

Delays and Closures

Escuela follows APS decisions regarding delays and closures. If APS is closed or on an abbreviated schedule due to severe weather or poor driving conditions, Escuela will follow suit. If APS is on a 2-hour delay, all classes (Toddler, Primary, Elementary, Junior High) will begin at 10:30 a.m. There will be no early morning childcare. Do not arrive before 10:00 a.m., as there will be no teachers on campus before this time. In the event of a snowstorm during the day it may be necessary to close early. We will utilize our text messaging alert system to contact families and share updates.

Changes in Home Routine

Please keep the staff informed of changes in a child's normal routine. Occurrences such as parents being away, separations, deaths or illness in the family, etc., can sometimes be the source of changes in your child's behavior. When teachers can better understand the child's behavior, they can be more supportive.

Dress

Children of all ages should come to school in clothing that is comfortable and allows them to work and play. Do expect your children's clothing to get soiled from playing and participating in activities such as cooking, painting, etc. Children in our Toddler and Primary are asked to bring extra changes of clothing (please see supply lists). Students' apparel should reflect respect for oneself and for others. Clothing should not display wording or graphics that are disrespectful and/or rude.

In-Service/Staff Work Days

Escuela faculty and staff will take up to four in-service days during the school year. These days are a necessary part of the school year because they provide professional development and work time (for making classroom materials, meetings, etc.) for the staff. Staff work-days contribute to the excellent quality of care your children receive at Escuela. The school will be closed on these days; no childcare will be available.

Discipline & Confidentiality

Discipline will include positive guidance, redirection, and the setting of clear limits that foster the child's own ability to become self-disciplined. Disciplinary practices are designed to encourage the child to be fair, to respect persons and property, and to assume personal and social responsibility. Student records, family situations, medical history, children's school performance, behavior, etc., are held private and confidential. Teachers will never discuss a child with anyone other than that child's own parent(s)/guardian(s) unless written consent to do so has been given by those parents(s)/guardian(s); or when consulting with another staff member or administrator.

EARLY CHILDHOOD

(ages 18 mos. - 6 yrs.)



The child's school journey begins here at Escuela del Sol. The Early Childhood communities encompass the Toddler (18 months – 3 yrs.) and Primary (Preschool, ages 3 yrs. – 6 yrs.) classrooms. Classrooms are carefully designed spaces where specially trained and experienced Montessori teachers guide each individual child's personal growth.

The Toddler Community is a young child's introduction to the larger world. Toddler Guides nurture the development of social skills, sensory exploration, independence and self-expression in an unhurried atmosphere of love and respect.

In the Primary classrooms, children from three to six years old are in a period of amazing brain development and physical growth. They long for challenging, meaningful, authentic experiences with real materials and concrete concepts. These classrooms are perfectly designed for the early childhood years to meet the unique needs of this stage of life, fostering movement, intellectual development, and social awareness.

The classroom is a place of respect. Everything is child-sized, from the custom-made tables and chairs to the shelves, vases, plates and utensils, even (and especially) the toilets.

Dedicated and trained teachers lead activities that develop motor skills, build hand strength and refine movement. Running, carrying, climbing, grasping knobs, doing puzzles, handling paint brushes and crayons, pushing carts, taking walks – all of these build skills and confidence. We also focus on building social skills – an area of challenge and growth. Children celebrate classmates' birthdays and other special occasions, learn each other's names and families, care for classroom pets and plants, and develop important skills of empathy and being part of a group.

Progress Reports and Conferences

Teachers will generate two written progress reports during each year. These reports, provided via email at the end of each semester, will reflect your child's / children's social, emotional, physical, creative and academic work.

In the fall and spring of each year, parents must attend parent-teacher conferences to discuss their child's/children's development and experiences at school. The school strongly encourages parents to contact their classroom guide(s) if questions or concerns arise. Our faculty is happy to arrange after-school meetings to stay in touch with parents, working together as a team on behalf of our students.

Outside Assessment and Guidance

The Montessori classroom can accommodate the needs of a wide range of children; some are able to receive special attention within that context. However, there are others who are not well served within a Montessori environment.

The school and its staff are committed to open and ongoing dialogue with parents regarding special concerns about every child's progress. The classroom guide, in conjunction with the Level Director, may, at times, request outside assessment and guidance for working with individual students.

Transitions/Classroom Placements

Continuity is the hallmark of the Montessori experience, as children stay in the same classroom for two or three years, sometimes more. This stability provides for both security and growth, as the child's role within the group changes over time from being one of the youngest in the class to one of the oldest. In a Montessori classroom, every child has the opportunity to be first a youngest child, then a middle child,

and finally an oldest child within his or her classroom family. This contributes to the child's personal growth in ways that traditional, single-age groupings cannot. Even so, children do make at least four transitions as they move through the entirety of the school's levels.

For some children, entrance into a Primary classroom is their first school experience. Others move to Primary from the Toddler Community. Independent care of self is one sign of readiness for the Primary; this may include toileting and dressing. We also look to a child's sense of order and independence. The sense of order can be seen in careful handling of classroom materials and in following a daily routine. Independence is shown by the child's successful separation from the parents, in the ability to choose their own work in the classroom and in their ability to verbally express his or herself. Some children benefit from spending more than three years in their Primary community before transitioning to Elementary.

ELEMENTARY

(grades 1 - 6)



The transition from Primary into Elementary marks the end of Early Childhood, the first plane of development, and the onset of the second plane. The minimum age for beginning the Elementary Program is six years by the start of school. In determining a child's readiness for moving to the Elementary, faculty first considers social and emotional maturity. We also look at the child's academic skills, impulse control, and ability to self-regulate.

At about age nine, students transition to the Sr. Elementary classroom. Each student's transition is considered by a joint committee of Jr. and Sr. Elementary faculty, in conjunction with the Level Director, and in consultation with parents. To make this transition successfully, the student must demonstrate increased independence, in terms of both academic skills and personal responsibility. Academically, he or she needs to be ready for complex research and mathematical problem-solving. The student needs a high degree of self-awareness and must be a respectful, contributing member of the classroom community.

Student Assessment

Our primary task is to help children flourish in an increasingly dynamic and connected world. Graduates of Escuela del Sol leave with at least two critically important assets that we believe will serve them throughout their lifetime: the ability to adapt and a love of learning.

The school provides a qualitative evaluation of student performance that takes into consideration the whole child, including strengths, challenges, and social, physical, academic and creative achievements; the education your child receives at Escuela del Sol extends far beyond basic skills. Conventional grades provide only a narrow quantitative evaluation of a child's work. Grading creates an environment of winners and losers, undermining the spirit of cooperation and community. Research indicates that grading actually reduces creativity, as students aim for work that will be safe and acceptable to the adult. Therein lies a third powerful reason not to use conventional grades: the children begin to work to please the adult rather than themselves, to work for the extrinsic rather than the intrinsic reward. For these reasons, Escuela del Sol does not grade or rank children.

Progress Reports and Conferences

Student growth is discussed and/or written about at least four times each school year. Twice a year, teachers will generate progress reports; and twice each year the school closes for parent-teacher conferences. Parents are encouraged to communicate and meet as needed; conference days are a minimum amount set aside in the school calendar.

In the fall and spring of each year, parents must attend parent-teacher conferences to discuss their child's/children's development and experiences at school. The school strongly encourages parents to contact their classroom guide(s) as questions or concerns arise. Our faculty is happy to arrange after-school meetings to stay in touch with parents, working together as a team on behalf of our students.

Outside Assessment and Guidance

The Montessori classroom can accommodate a wide range of unique needs. Some children are able to receive special attention within the classroom context. However, there are others who may not be well served within a Montessori environment. And there are times when outside support is required.

The school and its staff are committed to open and ongoing dialogue with parents regarding concerns about every child's progress. The Classroom Guide, in conjunction with the Level Director, may, at times, request outside assessment and guidance for working with individual students.

Homework

Conventionally speaking, homework refers to academic work. However, we like to broaden the term: all work that is done at home is homework. Thus, the work we do for ourselves, to improve ourselves, to pursue our own interests and dreams is also homework. This work could be an extension of work done on the job or at school, or it could be an unrelated activity or hobby that is meaningful to us individually. The line between work and play can become blurred here, just as work the children do at school is often fun and playful.

When Escuela children return home at the end of the school day, we hope they will have time to relax, and we hope they will do some "homework" as well. Experience managing responsibilities at home can directly support managing responsibilities at school. Homework expectations for Elementary children, as well as ideas about how children can practice responsibility at home, will be shared by the Elementary team.

Behavioral Expectations

If a student frequently behaves in an unacceptable manner, guides will consult with the Level Director and with the child's parents. If necessary, the school will suspend a student for up to three days at a time. More extreme measures (disenrollment) may be taken if the student and his/her parents are unable to work with the school to resolve behavioral issues successfully.

Behavior may reflect a need for counseling, educational/psychological screening or other professional support. Parents are expected to work with faculty for the child's best interest. This may include hiring an outside consultant to work with the family and school.



JR. HIGH

(grades 7 - 8)

The transition from childhood to adolescence is marked by many changes including physical, emotional and cognitive. Adolescents are increasingly concerned with who they are, how they will contribute meaningfully to their community, and how they will fit in. As with other levels, Jr. High offers a unique environment that meets the needs and characteristics of our 7th and 8th grade students, supported by increasingly sophisticated work, choices, and responsibilities.

The curriculum weaves academic research and skills with experiences that connect these emerging adults to adult-level work. Guided by a nuanced understanding of the gifts and challenges of adolescence, lessons are often given in the context of larger projects or community problem-solving. The

Jr. High environment challenges and inspires students to acquire new information, master new skills, and make deep connections with people and ideas to promote critical thinking, identity formation and independence within the context of community.

The Jr. High follows Dr. Montessori's two-part Plan of Study and Work, which is a framework for how to meet the needs and characteristics of adolescents. Part one of the Plan highlights the importance of social organization for young people. In our environment this includes opportunities to work on the small farm, participate in and manage the student business, host events, plan community dinners and field experiences, as well as managing the lunch program. Part two of the Plan details the elements of the curriculum that are considered for all projects. It includes **self-expression** through art, music, writing, and performance; **mathematics and geometry**; **English and Spanish language arts**; **health, wellness and ABAR training**; **humanities**, which covers a wide scope of human history, ingenuity and innovation, and **applied science/work on the land**, which includes chemistry, biology, botany and construction, to name a few. The core curriculum is interdisciplinary, project- and place-based experiential learning. It substantially exceeds state standards and has proven to prepare graduates for competitive high school programs.

Jr. High students begin each school year with an extended (approximately one week) wilderness experience, backpacking together in the mountains and forests of New Mexico. Together with the trained and Wilderness First Responder certified guides of The Cottonwood Gulch, this experience is a great community bonding and team building exercise for students and their teachers.

Expectations

An important aspect of Montessori at the adolescent level is allowing students to cultivate their agency and to actively participate in decision-making through experimentation with freedom and responsibility. We prioritize social organization as fundamental to the healthy development of young people and nurture an environment where freedom and responsibility support the individuals in the community.

Students are responsible for respecting themselves, each other and the environment, and for pursuing self-excellence through developmentally appropriate challenges. They are required to show up for lessons prepared, ready to focus, listen and participate fully in discussion and activity. There is freedom in how each student explores integrated projects, in the methods they utilize for internalization of concepts, the materials they use to design and build, the ideas they contribute and the topics they delve into.

Attendance

Our school day runs from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. It is important that students arrive on-time and remain in class until dismissal. Supplementally, there are monthly Community Dinners where students remain on campus until 7:30 p.m.

Assessment & Homework

There is homework in Jr. High, an important responsibility for adolescents. All classroom teachers assign homework throughout the year and students are expected to use a planner to keep track of assignments and due dates. Teachers support students with study skills and the development of positive work habits through one-on-one conferences, Advisory, morning meetings, and during Parent-Teacher conferences.

Students are assessed on work habits and engagement with integrated study and work projects, which include having work completed on time, coming prepared to lessons, managing projects, and collaboration. Adolescents need more support with tasks and follow-through, so we encourage families to discuss at-home study and homework rituals BEFORE the new school year.

Two end-of-semester progress reports are shared with families that detail student progress and highlight their work, leadership and participation in the community.

While students are continually assessed using both formative and summative assessments, as well as through personal self-reflection, we do not give grades. Grades are not accurate representations of what a student does or does not know, and do not give a holistic picture of the student learner. However, expectations are high for all students. We believe in learning partnerships; through innovative curriculum all students can thrive.

We believe that education should be accessible and inclusive. To this end, each student's workload might look a bit different based on their specific learning needs. However, all students are guided to set and exceed personal goals, to reflect honestly about personal challenges and work at their own intelligent edge, to meet assignment expectations and to turn in work that reflects excellence, creativity and innovation.

Summer Reading

It is crucial that all students maintain and sustain a reading practice throughout the summer. Each year a reading list including a variety of genres and reading levels will be provided to rising Jr. High students. Students are expected to choose three books from the summer reading list to complete before the first day of school.

Student Behavior

Jr. High students co-create a Code of Civility each year. This code hangs in the classroom and functions as a guide for how students and teachers will treat one another. Additionally, the class holds a weekly Community Meeting, which allows time and space to celebrate one another and to talk through challenges. All students are expected to treat one another, the environment and themselves with care and respect. When big issues arise we use Restorative Justice practices to address the harm. Adolescence is an emotional time and is marked by highs and lows, and feelings of alienation. In our space we seek to support the healthy functioning of each student. Conferences, parent involvement and possible referrals for mental health services are other ways we care for the individuals in our community.

THE PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Background

The purpose of this agreement is to clarify expectations. What can parents and the school expect of each other as we enter into a partnership to aid the development of your children?

This section of the Family Handbook aims to articulate expectations we agree on: what parents can reasonably expect of the school and what the school will ask of parents. It also aims to reduce the inevitable misunderstanding and disappointment that result when unstated expectations go unmet.

What can parents expect from the school?

Q. What can parents reasonably expect from the school?

A. Our community of children and adults comprise a social environment and culture that impacts the child's experience. We strive to make this environment emotionally supportive and safe for every child. This does not mean that there will not be challenges. It does mean that we will work with your child in developmentally appropriate ways to deal with problems as they arise, empowering them with social and communication skills, and aiding them in the development of emotional intelligence to prepare for a lifetime of working with others in different communities and organizations.

Q. What can I expect of the school academically?

A. Escuela del Sol aspires to fulfill its mission as a Montessori school. As a Montessori school, we are different from conventional schools. Our first commitment is to the multi-dimensional development of each child. Children in Montessori classrooms do amass a great deal of factual knowledge in school. However, our aim is for each child to be far more than a simple repository of information: we guide each child to think for themselves. Cognitive development and a solid academic foundation are important, yet they represent only one dimension of our aspirations for your child. Equally significant is your child's social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development, as well as the development of executive function skills.

Children are given choices and a great deal of freedom—within limits—during the school day. The choices a child makes, and the accompanying responsibilities, influence the emerging character of your child. Choosing their own work and shaping it to a considerable degree, following that work through to completion while working independently or in cooperation with others, children identify their interests and develop their individual gifts. As a graduate said, "Montessori students motivate each other to be self-motivated."

Q. What can I expect in terms of communication from the school?

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

There are two regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences each year, and two written summaries or progress reports. In the event of special concerns, your child's guide will contact you to discuss these concerns by phone, by email, or in person. In addition, we will communicate with you via classroom letters, the website, email messages, and short reports as needed for individual children. Each Escuela guide is a well-trained professional; their evaluation is confidential and based on direct observation of and interactions with your child. Our faculty will always offer the current best understanding of your child's progress, strengths and needs. For all children, this evaluation is based on the guide's observations, interactions and assessment, which may be augmented by input from the Level Director and/or auxiliary staff.

Regarding ongoing, school-wide communication, the school distributes a weekly newsletter via email, this Parent Handbook, school calendar, and other occasional letters and publications. [The Parent Portal](#) is a great resource and we encourage parents to visit their portal often.

Q. What can I expect of the school environment?

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

Dr. Montessori said that the classroom guide's first responsibility is to prepare the environment. This means that the learning materials should correspond to the developmental characteristics of the child at each level, and that those materials must be appealing to the child, correct in size, aesthetically pleasing, well maintained, and complete. More broadly, the whole school environment must meet these criteria: to appeal to the child and to inspire exploration. We are ever vigilant to ensure that the school building and grounds are physically safe, secure, and well maintained.

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

A. The school maintains accreditation with the American Montessori Society (AMS). This organization represents the most exacting standards of excellence for Montessori schools, both public and independent. The Early Childhood classrooms of Escuela del Sol (Toddler and Primary) are licensed by the Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) of the State of New Mexico.

At minimum, all Lead Guides have received a diploma from an AMS or AMI (Association Montessori International) teacher-training center. Many hold other degrees as well. Our guides are professionals with a sense of mission in working with children and demonstrate high standards for themselves and their students.

The school promotes a culture of professional growth in a number of ways. Guides work annually with each other and the Level Directors to create an individual action plan for meaningful faculty evaluation, driven by goal-setting for professional development.

Q. What can I expect of the school administration?

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

Administrative staff interface with all the various constituencies of the school: students, parents, extended family, faculty, board members, alumni, prospective parents, professional visitors, government officials, other schools and educational organizations, and the general public. In your interactions with administration, you can expect professional, courteous, and business-like conduct, as well as mutually respectful communication.

The Executive Director, Administrative Director, Business Manager, Level Directors and support staff comprise the administration of Escuela. The administrative team may, on occasion, face decisions requiring a balance of competing interests. Sometimes those factors are mutually exclusive; at times equally well-intentioned adults see matters differently. In making decisions, the administration will focus on the interests of individual children in balance with the needs of the school.

What does the school ask of parents?

Q. What is the school's most basic expectation of parents?

A. Make continuing efforts both to understand and to embrace the Montessori approach and to work in partnership with the school.

These efforts should begin before admission. Escuela desires parents who understand and embrace the mission of the school. To that end, we help parents learn about the Montessori approach by providing information and opportunities for parent workshops – so that parents can make an informed decision in choosing to enroll their children – and continue to provide more opportunities throughout a family's years at the school. Once children are enrolled, the school asks parents to attend regularly scheduled

parent/teacher conferences and parent workshops, and to familiarize themselves with the philosophy, policies, and procedures contained in this Parent Handbook and other school publications. Children thrive when home and school work in harmony, with both environments sharing the same educational values and expectations.

Q. What contribution can I make to a positive school community?

A. Demonstrate respect for all adults and children, the school, and Escuela/Harwood programs.

Model respect to your children – for them, their classmates, parents of classmates, guides and other school staff – in short, for everyone associated with the school. Respect begins with civility and deepens into trust. Our most fundamental behavioral guidelines for the children are, “respect yourself, respect others, and respect the environment.” We ask the same from adults, parents and school staff, at all times and in all relationships within the school community. This includes speech and outward behavior. Support your child by speaking of her/his guides, classmates, and school in positive terms. Respect and abide by the school’s policies and procedures. Honor your commitments. Look for ways to make a positive contribution to the life of the school.

Q. How can I create consistency between home and school?

A. Strive to parent according to Montessori principles.

Learn as much as you can about Montessori principles as they apply to preparation of your child’s home environment as well as the way we adults interact with our children. This begins with the general principle, “Never do something for your child that he can do for himself.” Allow your child to engage in all of the simple tasks of practical life that a child can do for himself at each stage of development. Montessori education may also entail learning a communication style different from the way in which we were parented. Children develop a love of learning and become responsible, independent, and capable people when parents’ values and expectations are consistent with those of the school.

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

A. Maintain active, direct and respectful, two-way communication with the school.

Read communications that are sent home, including letters, newsletters, emails, and calendars. Inform the school in a timely fashion of pertinent changes in your child’s life. Active communication involves parents sharing observations and concerns about their child with the child’s guides. In matters large and small, remember the principle of respect: even when there is disagreement, disagree respectfully. Children prosper most when the primary voices in their lives sing in harmony. Let’s work together for that music to happen!

PARENTS & GUARDIANS AT ESCUELA*

*Reference the current Covid Operating Plan for specific pandemic-related information.

As a parent at Escuela del Sol, you will have the opportunity to be actively involved in your child’s education away from home. At Escuela, we strongly believe that the process of education cannot be separated from the home and family life. Being a part of your child’s schooling will be a rewarding and educational experience. Parent nights, newsletters, and a standing invitation to visit, participate, or observe in our school give parents the opportunity to continue their understanding of the Montessori philosophy and their children’s activities.

Observation

After a settling-in period of four to six weeks, parents are invited to observe. This is your school and you are always welcome. Simply make an appointment through the office. Out of respect for the children, we

limit the number of adults in a classroom and encourage parents to observe in a classroom other than the one their child attends (as this can be confusing, distressing, and distracting for your child).

Communication

The organization has two websites; one for the school (www.escueladelosol.org) and one for its outreach program, The Harwood Art Center (www.harwoodartcenter.org). These two sites provide a wealth of information; you are strongly encouraged to visit both sites regularly. One of the most important features of the school's website is the [Parent Portal](#), where you will find quick links to forms, school updates, the school calendar, and more.

A weekly e-newsletter called "In The Loop" provided to all currently enrolled families, will keep you up to date as well. Please be sure the school's email is not placed in your server's spam folder so you do not miss out on information, opportunities and reminders.

Suggestions/Complaints

If you become dissatisfied with the school in any way, please seek to resolve the matter with the person or persons involved rather than spread criticism. Please know that the Board, administration and faculty of Escuela del Sol value the well-being and happiness of children and know that if parents are unhappy, children soon will be. Talk to us as soon as you have any questions or feel any dissatisfaction. We will work together to resolve situations that may arise. If you have a problem with your child's guide or class, please first discuss this with the guide and/or an administrator. Any administrative problems can be discussed with a member of our administrative team or with President of the Board of Trustees, Maria Garcia Geer.

Parent/Faculty Work Days

Parent/faculty work days are scheduled for various events and/or needs. Not only do these gatherings help keep our campus in tip-top shape, but they also provide opportunity for connection, community building, and fun. If you have a particular skill you'd like to contribute, please let the office know how and when you can help.

Fundraising and Events

The tuition you pay covers the school's basic operating costs. Tuition is not sufficient to provide tuition assistance to families, funds for additional classroom materials, and renovations to playgrounds and buildings.

While basic operating expenses are covered through tuition and fee payments and earned income, the school does engage in fundraising, as does virtually every independent school. Each year the school has one main fundraising program, our annual end-of-year campaign in which we raise money for our Escuela Fund, Tuition Assistance, and areas which change annually, such as professional development or playground equipment. Escuela engages in other fundraising campaigns throughout the year as needed. This could be for a class trip, a specific need in the community, or a fundraising campaign instigated by students for an important cause or project they are working on.

Annual Fund

Donations to Escuela are tax-deductible and payments can be made until July of the giving year. Gifts may also be eligible for matching funds from employers. Reaching 100% family participation in the Annual Fund is as important as reaching our financial goal: it is vital to the school's continued success in obtaining gifts and grants from corporations and foundations. Each family is strongly encouraged to give to its ability and to fulfill pledged commitments. November and December are designated as Annual Appeal season. Contact Executive Director Kate Chavez for more information.

Other Ways of Giving

Escuela del Sol endeavors to enlist the support of all parents, grandparents, faculty, staff, and other community friends in securing funds from the rebate program Amazon Smile. Beneficiary organizations receive a biannual payout reflecting a percentage of the purchases made by participants. The more people who participate, the more money the school is able to raise. Amazon Smile can be accessed through our website. Please help us make the most of these by participating.

Escuela del Sol offers for sale Escuela gear and gear. Show your Escuela pride by making a purchase from our online store and wearing your gear in your community. Help spread the Escuela mission; To inspire a passion for life-long learning.

You can also give to the school through planned giving, vehicles, stock, insurance policies, and by inclusion in your will. If you are interested in this method of ensuring your continued support, please contact the Executive Director, Kate Chavez, at (505) 242-3033.

Sol Mates

Escuela's parent group is called Sol Mates. Sol Mates is an inclusive parent and caregiver volunteer organization designed to support teachers, classrooms, and families at Escuela del Sol. Please see the Sol Mates page on Escuela's website for more information.

A few years ago, in an effort to help new families orient themselves to the school community, Sol Mates created a mentoring program. The program aims to match new and experienced families to answer questions, explain traditions, and introduce Sol Mates. Reach out to SolMates@edelsol.org for more information.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNANCE

Escuela del Sol Montessori is incorporated as a non-profit corporation, and managed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees. The Board is governed by the school's Articles of Incorporation and by its By-Laws. The Board is comprised of members selected from the community who are chosen for expertise in their respective fields, their commitment and ability to work on behalf of the whole organization (Escuela del Sol and its Harwood Art Center). Candidates for board service are evaluated by the Board's Development Committee. The Board of Trustees serves as custodian of the integrity of the school, holding in trust the school's future as well as its present. Their collective judgment respects the interests of constituents and of the larger society that all independent schools serve. The Board as a whole represents continuity and permanent responsibility. It is responsible for effective strategic planning and for the school's fiscal well-being.

The Board selects, hires and evaluates the Executive Director (ED). The Board delegates responsibility for implementation of policies to the ED, who works with the Business Manager to prepare the Annual Budget for approval by the Board. The ED also has the duty to report to the Board on organizational matters, and is accountable to the Board for effective, businesslike management of the organization. The ED serves as the professional educational leader of the institution. She has complete responsibility for faculty, staff, and student selection, evaluation, and dismissal. The ED articulates the mission of the school to its constituencies and is responsible for the professional quality and behavior of the faculty and staff.

HOW TO REACH US

Escuela del Sol Office, office@edelsol.org 505-242-3033

Kate Chavez, Executive Director of Escuela/Harwood, Kate@edelsol.org
Elizabeth Marcilla, Administrative Director, ElizabethM@edelsol.org
Jodie Martinez, Business Manager, Jodie@edelsol.org
Dana McCabe, Early Childhood Level Director, Dana@edelsol.org
Sarah Louderbough, Elementary Level Director, Sarah@edelsol.org
Tanesia Hale-Jones, Jr. High Lead Guide and Level Director, Tanesia@edelsol.org
Carmela Chavez Liberman, Media and Communications, Carmela@edelsol.org
Elora Daniels, Administrative Services Coordinator, Elora@edelsol.org
Robin Soliz, Administrative Assistant, Robin@edelsol.org

Escuela Fax 1-800-317-4752

Harwood Art Center, info@harwoodartcenter.org 505-242-6367

Julia Mandeville, Chief Programs Officer, Julia@harwoodartcenter.org
Jennifer DePaolo, Director of Outreach, Jennifer@harwoodartcenter.org
Jordyn Bernicke, Associate Director of Engagement, Jordyn@harwoodartcenter.org
Helen Juliet Atkins, Associate Director of Opportunity, Helen@harwoodartcenter.org
Dani Belvin, Director of Education, Dani@harwoodartcenter.org

WEBSITES:

Escuela, www.escueladelsol.org
Harwood, www.harwoodartcenter.org

EMERGENCY NUMBERS:

Joseph Marcilla, FacilitiesManager 505-315-0033
After-hours school-related emergencies 505-397-8665

See the Escuela and Harwood webpages for updates, monthly lunch menus, announcements, and more!