

ATALA MONTESSORI



School for Creative Expression
ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL
PARENT HANDBOOK
2024–2025

Introduction

Dear Parents,

We are delighted that you have chosen **Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression!** This Parent Handbook is designed to better explain the policies and procedures of the school. We believe that through a strong partnership between the parents and school anything is possible!

Cordially,

Sra. Elizabeth Valle, Owner + Director of Toddler Education
Sra. Beatriz Scheff, Owner + Director of Preschool Education
Mrs. Patricia Howarth, Owner + Director of Elementary Education
Dr. Kristine H. Burns, Owner + Chief Administrator and Director of Middle School

The **Mission** of Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression is to provide an educational environment that enables each child to realize his or her richest potential for learning and to become a creative, self-directed, confident, and contributing member of the family, local, and global communities.

Philosophy

We at Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression believe in helping our students discover their inner creativity through exploring the arts. Our students have many opportunities to experience a wide range of artistic expression, developing their self-confidence and joyfulness. We work hard to foster a life-long love of learning, while stressing effective, positive communication skills and encouraging constructive decision making. We embrace diversity at Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression. Students experience and learn to respect ethnic and cultural differences and are encouraged to seek and identify commonalities. This helps our students achieve personal growth which involves responsibility to others and to our earth.

Certification and Accreditation

All our elementary and middle school teachers hold degrees in education or related fields and our directors are Montessori trained and certified. Together we have nearly 200 years of experience in education, arts, and Montessori teaching. The children of our teachers and administrators have been through a Montessori education, so we have experienced the classroom from a parent's perspective, as well as a teacher's point of view.

We are accredited by the Association of Independent Schools of Florida and are certified by the Early Learning Coalition. We are Associate members of the American Montessori Society.

Admission and Enrollment Requirements

The registration fee, materials fee, enrollment form, birth certificate, health form, and immunization records are required to complete enrollment. If your child is exempt from immunizations, a statement that meets the requirements of the Florida Minimum Standard Rules must be in our file.

A non-refundable annual \$500 Registration Fee is required of all students at the time the application or re-enrollment form is returned. Tuition is billed through Blackbaud Management Company. There is an annual \$50 fee for each family enrolling in the Blackbaud system (the actual fee may vary slightly year to year). Arrangements can be made for single annual and biannual payments paid directly to Atala Montessori School. A late fee of \$50 will be added to your account if your payment is received late.

If a Blackbaud payment is declined and is past due more than two weeks, we will request a meeting between the owners and directors of Atala Montessori and the parents. After six weeks of non-payment the student will not be allowed to attend class until the account is settled.

A \$300 materials fee is required for each academic year. This fee covers all our books, workbooks, art supplies, and related costs. The fee is also used to cover the costs of two field trips per year. The fee is to be paid in one lump sum prior to the beginning of the academic year.

Your child's immunization and health record, as well as a copy of his/her birth certificate, must be maintained and current. Please submit any new shot records or health information promptly. If the immunization form is outdated, you will need to keep your child home until you are able to update it with your doctor.

Students coming from non-Montessori backgrounds are accepted. Prior to acceptance of any new student (K-8) we require a basic academic screening, two years of report cards, and two years of standardized assessments (SATs, FSA, VPK tests, or similar) from the student's previous school, and samples of current homework. In general we are looking for students who are performing at grade level, have good conduct and effort grades, and have good attendance records.

Arrival and Dismissal

Middle School, Upper and Lower Elementary students need to arrive between **7:45 and 8:00 am, as the academic day begins promptly at 8:00 am**. The drop-off point is at the north side of our building at the "dog gate." A teacher or assistant will greet you and your child at the car door and escort the child to his or her classroom or designated meeting spot. If you need to walk your child to class, especially in the first few days of the new year, please use the northwest parking lot.

Please note that you will be asked to sign your child in and out each day. The assistants and teachers will have class attendance sheets with them in the mornings and afternoons, and you will be asked to initial each time your child is dropped off or picked up from our care.

Late Arrival

We do not accept habitual late arrivals. If you are arriving late (after 8:00 am) for a documented medical reason, please bring your child to the office and we will take him or her to class. We try to minimize interruptions and the spread of outside germs during the day, and we appreciate your promptness. The parents of *all* students will need to adhere to the following attendance and tardiness policy.

Promptness is very important in the elementary and middle school classroom. Many of the lessons are presented in small groups, as opposed to preschool where lessons are presented individually. Children who are chronically late can fall significantly behind since the curriculum builds upon each lesson. Being late does not put them in the best frame of mind to begin their day of work. We have all been late for an appointment or for work and it is not a pleasant feeling. It can take a while to get "in synch."

Children need to learn habits of successful people. If they want to go to a high school of their choice, get into a good college, and get their "dream job" there are habits that need to be instilled. Completing homework, doing your work carefully and neatly, and being on time are the basic skills for which schools,

colleges, and employers look. There is nothing that makes us prouder than hearing from former students who have gone on to successful careers and lives.

Dismissal

Elementary and middle school dismissal takes place between 2:45 and 3:00 pm. Dismissal for elementary and middle school students takes place in the courtyard at the Dog Gate. Please do not linger as our teachers and After Care staff need to maintain safety for all the children. When picking a child up early, please come to the office and we will bring your child to you. More than five early dismissals in a quarter will necessitate communication with the teacher.

Only those individuals listed on the “Permission for Pick Up” list will be allowed to take your child from campus. Please realize that we will ask for identification to insure that your child is picked up by correct person. We will not release a child to anyone appearing to be intoxicated or impaired in any way.

No child shall be released within the final thirty (30) minutes of the school day unless authorized through a doctor’s note or emergency medical issue. This is extremely disruptive to the flow of the day for both the classroom and the office.

A child accumulating 10 or more class unexcused absences during the school year may have quarter report cards and other academic test results withheld pending an academic screening and completion of assigned work by the classroom teacher. Excessive absences may also result in the need to repeat the grade.

As a reminder, parents need to come to the office to drop off your child late or pick up your child early. **Do not go directly to the classrooms.** The staff has all been instructed not to open their doors.

Before Care, After Care, and Study Hall

Before Care is available for children arriving between 7:00–7:45 am. There is an extra charge is \$4 per morning, per child. Please bring your child in through the Dog Gate to meet the staff member waiting for arrivals.

After Care is available from 3:00–6:00 pm for an extra fee of \$4.00 per hour per student, with a 50% discount for all siblings. You will be billed every month at the end of each month. When you come to pick up your child, please park your car at the Dog Gate, step out, and sign out your child with the staff on duty. Children will be available for pick up in the courtyard or in the Lower Elementary classroom.

Study Hall

Elementary and Middle School students may participate in Study Hall Monday through Thursday immediately following dismissal. First and second grade students have a half-hour period in which to finish their homework. Third through eighth grade students are offered a 45-minute period to complete their classroom and homework. All students staying beyond dismissal times are automatically taken to Study Hall. The cost is \$4.00 per day and is billed every month with any additional After Care charges.

All Before and After Care and Study Hall invoices are sent during the first 3 days of the new month. You are charged for the time your child spends with us. Payments are due within 5 business days and if the payment is not received, you will receive a second invoice with a 5% late fee added. You will be required to pay that additional late fee or the payment will be returned. If after another five days the bill remains unpaid, your child will no longer be able to use these services.

Please do not interrupt Study Hall. This is an important time when students are finishing their studies for the day. If you need to pick up your child, be sure to be here no later than 3 pm or wait until Study Hall is over (between 3:30 and 3:45 pm, depending on the age group). If you are running late you please wait until Study Hall is over as everyone pays extra for those services and it is unfair to disrupt that quiet study time. After Study Hall, all children will be returned to the courtyard. At that time we now ask that you remain outside of the “Dog Gate.” After Care staff will call your child to retrieve their things and enter the time on the board. You are then asked to initial in your spot. Please double check the time entered and if you have any questions speak directly to the After Care staff.

Late Pick-Up

If you will be late in picking up your child, please notify the office right away. There is an additional charge of \$1.00 per minute late fee if your child remains after 6:00 pm. Payment is due to Atala Montessori within 24 hours.

All Before and After Care and Study Hall invoices are sent during the first 3 days of the new month. You are charged for the time your child spends with us. Payments are due within 5 business days and if the payment is not received, you will receive a second invoice with a 5% late fee added. You will be required to pay that additional late fee or the payment will be returned. If after another five days the bill remains unpaid, your child will no longer be able to use these services.

Absences

Students are to be counted in attendance only if they are actually present for at least two hours of the day or engaged in a school-approved educational activity which constitutes a part of the instructional program for the student.

Please notify the office if your child is going to be absent. Arrangements will be made to make up work as needed for elementary and middle school students. You will need to provide an original doctor's note or other appropriate documentation for all excused absences. This note is due the day the child returns to school. Atala staff do verify suspicious notes.

In accordance with Miami-Dade County policies, any unexcused absences over 10 days during a single academic year may necessitate summer school attendance or tutoring. In extreme cases, students may be asked to repeat a grade. Unexcused absences include:

- Vacations, personal services, local non-school event, program or sporting activity
- Older students providing day care services for siblings
- Illness of others
- Non-compliance with immunization requirements (unless lawfully exempt).

Homework

Students are expected to complete required work in a timely manner. While many lessons are completed in class, there will be work that must be completed at home. Those students who consistently do not complete and turn in homework will be required to finish all assignments during summer school before they can be promoted to the next grade.

Dress

All children are suggested to wear uniform shirts Monday through Thursday. While we recommend a basic khaki uniform pant, they are not required. Information on sizes, colors, and prices will be available prior to the start of school. Please label all coats, sweaters, and removable clothing with your child's name.

Cowboy boots, sandals, flip-flops, Crocs, and clogs are not appropriate for regular school days, but may be worn on special occasions. They are not safe for running and climbing on equipment. Closed-toed, soft-soled shoes or sneakers are best for school.

Dress for Fridays is open, but short shorts/skirts/dresses, Cosplay costumes, spaghetti straps, "belly" shirts that expose the stomach and/or back area, t-shirts with inappropriate text or images, ripped jeans, and other improper clothing is not allowed.

Birthdays

Your child's birthday is a very special time, and children enjoy celebrating their birthdays together. We welcome birthday celebrations in the class. Please let the teacher know if you plan to bring birthday treats. The only time the teacher is able to hand out invitations to private birthday parties is when there is an invitation for everyone in the class. If only some of the children in the class are invited, please mail, email the invitations or hand them out outside of school.

If you choose to send in birthday treats, please send cupcakes, cookies, or other individually portioned snacks with enough for everyone. Children at this age celebrate with their peers, so parents are urged to

drop off all treats no later than 10 am in the office. Please do not send in tablecloths or decorations other than plates or napkins. Students have only 30 minutes for lunch and birthday observances before the picnic area needs to be available for the next group.

Show and Tell

Lower Elementary students have the opportunity to participate in a show and tell day. Specific days will be assigned during the first week of classes. Each day at 8:00 am students may bring in any item of educational or personal value. Please note: if the student not on time to class, his or her turn will be skipped until the next week.

Personal Phone Calls and Apple Watches

In order to avoid interruptions in the classroom, we do not allow for personal phone calls between a parent and a child during school hours or in After Care. Rather, the staff can pass personal messages to your child as needed (e.g. you are running late for pick-up and your child will be going to After Care, you are having a unanticipated person pick up your child from school, or you are questioning your child if they want to stay for club or After Care free time).

Field Trips and Extracurricular Activities

Field trips are scheduled periodically in all classrooms. Please check the online calendar for updates. Permission slips will be sent home in a timely manner. Parents must let us know if they do not want their child to participate in a field trip.

Lunch

A nutritious lunch includes protein, cereal/grains, fruits/vegetables, and dairy. Independence is a basic principle of the Montessori environment, so please pack your child's lunch so it is easily managed. Your child should be able to open the lunch box, thermos, juice box, or water bottle, and all accompanying packaging. We do not have facilities to refrigerate or reheat lunches. Sodas, doughnuts, pop-tarts, chocolate, candy, and other high-sugar sweets are discouraged. If you forgot to send in lunch in the morning, please have it delivered to the office no later than 10:00 am.

Friday Pizza Day

Pizza is available on most Fridays for an additional cost. Costs are variable based on the classroom. You will be notified by your classroom teacher as to the weekly cost and deadline to pay. If your child chooses not to partake of Friday's pizza lunch, please send lunch as usual. **Please note: the office does not receive pizza money. All money must be turned in directly to the teacher no later than Thursday morning at drop off. There are no exceptions.**

Devices

Please note that if your child requests to bring a device (e.g. phone, computer, tablet, Smart Watch) from home for class work (particularly in the older grades), they bring that device at your risk. We provide a number of devices in every classroom which can also be used. At no time should children be calling or texting their parents or friends during school or after care hours. Please note that Smart Watches such as an Apple iWatch, Google Pixel Watch, etc. should not be brought to school. Please keep these items at home as they are a tremendous distraction to students.

School Calendar and Holidays

In general, we follow the schedule of holidays of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. A list of days when the school is closed can be found on the Academic Schedule on our website. A monthly calendar is available of your child's room activities on atalamontessori.org.

Atala Montessori is not affiliated with any religious organization; however, we do recognize and celebrate major holidays. Please advise us if your child does not participate in any of these.

Medication and Illness

If a child becomes ill with fever, diarrhea, or vomiting the parent will be notified immediately by phone to pick your child up. If a child has symptoms of pink eye or lice, the parent will also be notified to pick the child up immediately. In either case, the child will not be allowed back into the classroom until all symptoms have cleared up. Please keep your child home for 24 hours until the symptoms are gone to help prevent spreading the illness to the other children. Kindly notify the school of a contagious illness.

All prescription medications must be signed in by the parent daily and left in the medication cabinet in the office, in the original container with the child's name on it. Medicine Authorization forms must be signed by the parent or guardian for the safety of the child. Our staff is not allowed to dispense any medication with phone permission. We are not allowed to dispense any non-prescription medication and can only dispense prescription medications with the proper documentation.

If we have called to notify you that your child is sick, you must respond. If you are unable to respond immediately, we will begin calling the people on Emergency Contact list. If there is still no response or plan for pick in place and we believe that the child is needing medical attention, we will call 911. Per DCF regulations, if a parent does not respond to this type of situation, a Medical Neglect Report will be filed. Please make sure your voicemail is not full.

Policy for Accidents, Incidents, or Illness

If a child is injured or becomes ill while at school, the teacher or assistant will complete the "Incident and Illness Form" documenting the situation. If the situation is of an urgent nature, parents will notified by phone and possibly asked to pick up their child. Parents are required to sign the report at pick up. If the child has an incident of misbehavior, parents will receive an Incident Report documenting the issue.

Emergency Situations

The Atala staff is trained in CPR and First Aid. In a medical emergency, the child will receive immediate attention and then the parent will be called to pick up the child. In an extreme medical emergency, the child will receive immediate attention, 911 will be called, and then the parents will be called.

All numbers on the Emergency Contact and Medical Information Form will be called once. Per DCF regulations, if there is no response from anyone on the list, 911 will be automatically called. Therefore, it is extremely important that you answer your phones if the school calls.

If there is a request to pick up your child because of an injury or illness, you must arrange for someone from your Permission to Pick-Up List list to pick him or her up within the hour. If your child appears to get worse or if you take longer than one hour to pick up, per DCF regulations, 911 must be called.

Parents will be notified of any situation that may have endangered their child, such as exposure to severe illness, injury (minor or major) or situations that render the school unsafe.

Policy for Reporting Abuse and Neglect

All Atala Montessori School for Creative Expression staff are mandated to directly report any suspicion of child abuse, child neglect, child sexual abuse, and/or exploitation of children, elderly or adults. In all cases the State of Florida law on reporting child abuse and neglect will be followed by calling the State Abuse Registry at 1-800-962-2873.

Emergency Numbers

It is **imperative** that the office has current daytime numbers where a family member can be reached in the event of an emergency. If your contact number should change, please advise the office immediately in writing. Please make sure your voicemail is not full.

Parent Involvement

We invite parents to volunteer at the school. Please communicate with the classroom teacher and Room Parent about various projects in which you would like to participate and to arrange specific days and times. Parent-Teacher conferences are once during the year. Additional times may be arranged by contacting the teacher directly. While we greatly appreciate our parents, we also ask that you adhere to our policies. Inappropriate behavior as deemed by the owners of Atala Montessori School may result in dismissal from the school.

Guidance and Discipline

The school is interested in any information providing insight into your child's behavior, such as inability to sleep well for several consecutive nights, the birth of a sibling, stress occurring at home or in school, etc. Parents are asked to inform the teacher of such matters in person, by email, by phone, or in writing.

If possible, on the classroom and on the playground, the children are redirected before a behavioral problem develops. At Atala, we use positive discipline with children because we want to encourage children to learn responsibility and cooperation. We develop a strong connection with your child, teach with love, set clear expectations, demonstrate positive behavior, emphasize solutions, and focus on what to do to correct the situation.

Parents will be called for a conference if we have a repetitive disruptive behavior. Consistency between home and school is very important, and parents and teachers should work together to set clear limits. Consequences will be established and set in place.

Grievance Procedure

We want you to be happy and comfortable with the faculty and staff at Atala Montessori. Our greatest concern is the safety, happiness, and education of your children. If you have a question or concern, please feel free to discuss the issue with your child's teacher in writing or in a conference. We are hopeful that the situation will be remedied by open communication between everyone involved. Our door is always open.

If you have a concern with an issue in the classroom, please speak to your child's teacher directly. If you do not believe the situation has been addressed, please request a meeting with the area supervisor. In extreme cases, you may wish to ask the office to coordinate a meeting with the five Atala owners. Each of the owners is responsible for separate areas of the school. Their assignments are as follows: Sra. Elizabeth Valle (Toddler classrooms and Preschool/Toddler after care), Sra. Beatriz Scheff (Preschool classes, VPK, art, Spanish for those ages), Mrs. Patricia Howarth (Lower and Upper Elementary classrooms including Spanish, music, and art for those ages), and Dr. Kristine Burns (office administration, Middle School classes, PE for all age groups, elementary/middle school after care).

Withdrawing from Atala

We reserve the right to withdraw your child from school for consistent behavior issues, non-payment, or any of the other issues outlined in the annual Parent Handbook and Enrollment packets. Should you need to withdraw your child from Atala, the office requires an official letter in writing 2 weeks ahead of time. Upon receipt of the letter, we will return your health forms and consider options for canceling your tuition contract for the remainder of the year. Please contact the office for any questions on this policy.

Emergency Procedures

Atala Montessori School will be closed if a hurricane warning is issued. If a hurricane or tornado warning is issued during school hours, we will notify you immediately of an impending early dismissal. We will follow the same actions of the Miami-Dade County Public Schools. You may watch Channels 4, 6, 7, and 10 for school closing information. We will also post updates on our Facebook page. Following a hurricane, telephone communication may be interrupted. In this case, parents are urged to drive to the school and check the communication board that will be placed at the office entrance. Atala Montessori will reopen as quickly as is reasonably possible following a hurricane.

In accordance with policy, fire drills are held each month so your children will know the correct way to exit the building. All classes will meet in the west and northwest parking lots. The teachers call roll, and once

given clearance, everyone will return to the classroom. We also hold intruder and weather-related drills four times per year so the children are aware of the procedures.

When the school goes on an emergency lockdown, we do not allow anyone to enter to exit the premises. You will be alerted by email and then receive updates as we are able. Once we receive the all-clear, we will send another email updating everyone. Please do not attempt to pick-up your child. We will not release them until we are all in a safe situation.

Physical Education, Music, Spanish, and Art Instruction

While many of our classes will incorporate aspects of movement, drama, singing, and visual art, we also offer dedicated periods of study during the class day and in after school activities.

Physical Education

Students in first through eighth grades enjoy outdoor playtime several times a week. Otherwise, their recess is in the courtyard. Students are asked to bring hats and reusable water bottles for outside activity.

Please note: Middle School students may be required to wear a uniform shirt (any color), shorts (not jeans), socks, and sneakers on PE days. They will need to bring an extra shirt to change into after PE (a full clothing is not necessary, but if you prefer sending in a complete change, that is your choice). Also, everyone must have a water bottle. Anyone who does not have a water bottle cannot participate in PE and will not receive a grade for that day.

Music

Elementary and Middle School students receive music instruction each week for one hour. Students will be introduced to topics such as singing, folk music, and American music history.

Art

All students will receive art instruction once a week. Many projects are related to holidays, seasons, historical events, and cultural studies. Projects will be displayed throughout the year at various family events.

Spanish

All Elementary and Middle School students will have Spanish classes each week. Our Spanish curriculum is taught by a native Spanish speaker and includes not only conversation, but also reading and writing, as well as cultural activities.

Updates

If you have updated telephone, email, or other contact information that needs to be updated. Please visit the office to update your child's information sheet. We will pass along these updates to all the classrooms and after care staff.

Please remember to check our website (atalamontessori.org) for updates on the school and our events. Each class maintains its own page with an activity calendar and reminders from the teachers. We notify parents through hard copy letters and email. You may also wish to join us on Facebook and Instagram for updates on the activities at school. You are invited to contact the school at 786-738-1210 or by email information@atalamontessori.org for any questions or concerns.

Parent Code of Conduct

We teach our children to be considerate of others and work out disagreements in a respectful manner. We expect our parents to act in the same way and treat our staff, volunteers, and other children with respect at all times. We ask that you take the time to read through our Parent Code of Conduct and use it as a way of handling possible conflicts with others at Atala.

1. Parents and other guardians are expected to follow the school rules of Atala Montessori and treat the staff, volunteers, and children with respect.
2. Parents who have any concerns about specific children, teachers, administrators, club directors, volunteers, or other staff members are expected to direct their concerns and comments to

the classroom teacher first and then the owner who oversees that age level. Many of our staff members are not full-time employees so we ask that you begin a conversation with the classroom teacher or administrator when conflicts arise.

3. A parent or guardian who verbally mistreats another child or adult at the school will be asked to leave right away. Depending on the severity of the issue, their child may also be removed from the school for the remainder of the year.

4. If necessary and only in extreme circumstances, the police will be called to remove any parent or guardian who gets out of control verbally or physically with another person at Atala Montessori School.

Please sign and return to the office.

Parent Code of Conduct

We teach our children to be considerate of others and work out disagreements in a respectful manner. We expect our parents to act in the same way and treat our staff, volunteers, and other children with respect at all times. We ask that you take the time to read through our Parent Code of Conduct and use it as a way of handling possible conflicts with others at Atala.

1. Parents and other guardians are expected to follow the school rules of Atala Montessori and treat the staff, volunteers, and children with respect.
2. Parents who have any concerns about specific children, teachers, administrators, club directors, volunteers, or other staff members are expected to direct their concerns and comments to the classroom teacher first and then the owner who oversees that age level. Many of our staff members are not full-time employees so we ask that you begin a conversation with the classroom teacher or administrator when conflicts arise.
3. A parent or guardian who verbally mistreats another child or adult at the school will be asked to leave right away. Depending on the severity of the issue, their child may also be removed from the school for the remainder of the year.
4. If necessary and only in extreme circumstances, the police will be called to remove any parent or guardian who gets out of control verbally or physically with another person at Atala Montessori School.

____ (please initial) I have read the guidelines of the Parent Code of Conduct Policy.

Student Name (please print)

I have received, read, and understand the content of the Atala Parent Handbook.

Parent Signature

Date