

Western Oaks Montessori School

A Montessori Primary Program

Parent Handbook 2024-2025

Mission Statement

The mission of Western Oaks Montessori School is to provide a safe and nurturing environment to meet each child's needs so they can reach their full potential. Children are inspired to develop a strong sense of self in a developmentally appropriate prepared environment. We cultivate a rich, social, diverse, and inclusive experience. Western Oaks Montessori focuses on educating the whole child through social, emotional, and academic ventures.

Licensing

Western Oaks Montessori is a fully licensed and insured in-home care provider through the Child Care Licensing division of Texas Health and Human Services. A copy of the most recent licensing inspection report as well as the phone numbers for the local licensing office and Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline is available for review. Families can access the minimum standards online at <https://www.hhs.texas.gov>

Program Description

Western Oaks Montessori is a Montessori primary program that serves children ages 2.5-6 years old. The beautiful and prepared environment allows children to grow in independence and confidence. Children learn how to care for themselves, the community, and the environment. They express themselves through art, oral and written language. Math materials are hands-on and concrete to establish a strong foundation. Science, yoga, geography, cultural studies, and music are incorporated throughout the day. We embrace all cultures and backgrounds and respect various traditions.

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Staff

Western Oaks Montessori is owned and led by Jessica Whinery, an AMI trained and certified guide. Jessica also holds a BS in Early Childhood Education; she has experience in both public schools and Montessori schools. Jessica has her 200 hour yoga certificate and is currently in Children's Yoga Teacher Training. She continues learning and growing by taking professional development courses throughout the year.

Admissions & Enrollment

Western Oaks Montessori welcomes children ages 2.5-6 years old. **We encourage you to read the handbook thoroughly to assess if this program is the perfect fit for your family.** If you are interested in enrolling your child after reading the handbook, please email Jessica at westernoaksmontessori@gmail.com to schedule a phone call. Tours are also available after school hours and can be scheduled by emailing Jessica. Tours are only for parents/caregivers.

If your child is not ready to join our program but you would like to be added to the waitlist, please send us an email.

Enrollment is not on a first-come, first served basis. Children are enrolled based on the needs of the community and their family's commitment to the program.

Annual Calendar

Rather than having one day in August when all children return to school, Western Oaks Montessori has a phase-in process that brings the children from the previous year back to school first. This allows our community to re-establish norms and foster leadership in the oldest children.

All children starting for the first time will have a series of pre-visits with Jessica in the days leading up to their first day of school. More information about pre-visits will be sent before your child's first day, typically the first week of August.

Advance notice will be given in the event Jessica needs to take a personal day off.

We follow the cancellation policy of AISD. In the event that AISD cancels school, delays the start of the school day, or closes early due to inclement weather conditions, Western Oaks Montessori will follow suit. There will be no refunds or tuition credits in any of the above occurrences.

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Daily Operation

Enrollment includes a half-day or full-day option, 5 days a week, Monday-Friday.

Half day hours: 8:30am-12:00pm

Full day hours: 8:30am-3:00pm

Parent Communication

The relationship between Western Oaks Montessori and the parents is a partnership. Western Oaks Montessori puts the interests of the children first, before our own and even before yours. We are advocates for the children and believe in best practices. We are in this together! Please do not hesitate to reach out if you need support. It takes a village to raise a child, and our community is that village.

Jessica values frequent, timely, and open communication with you about your child. Since she will be with the children all day, she is unavailable to answer phone calls or speak to you in person during the school day. Emails will be responded to within 24-48 hours. Texts should be reserved for emergencies only.

Formal individual conferences between Jessica and parents occur twice a year. Jessica or the parents may request additional meetings when necessary.

Please inform Jessica if there is a change in the home situation: death, divorce, relocation (even within Austin), a new baby, a new babysitter or caregiver, a change in the child's daily routine, or any fears, bad dreams, or fantasies. A change at home will often be reflected simultaneously or subsequently in behavior at school. Communication from parents will enable Jessica to help the child as the need arises.

Emails are sent monthly pertaining information about classroom happenings, school events closures, and more. It is important for parents to read all emails coming from the school.

Attendance Expectations

Because each child is important to the community and children benefit from a predictable and consistent schedule, **we ask that you make every effort to avoid late arrivals and absences if at all possible.** If late arrivals are persistent, you may be asked to keep your child home for the day. If your child will be absent, please let us know via email. If your child is sick the morning of, a text message will be appreciated.

Initial _____

General Health & Safety Information

Health Forms & Immunizations

Prior to your child's first day, we are required by Child Care Licensing to obtain:

- A health form, or written statement, from a licensed health-care professional who has examined your child within the last year indicating that your child is able to participate in our program.

In addition, you must submit, prior to your child's first day, either:

- A current copy of your child's immunization records which must be updated as applicable; OR, • A notarized State of Texas Immunization Waiver form if you choose not to immunize your child.

These forms will be requested from the school over the summer and must be turned in before your child starts school.

Illness & Medical Emergencies

Communicable Diseases

We are required per Licensing to report any confirmed cases of communicable disease, including COVID-19, within our community to the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) as well as Child Care Licensing. Minimum Standards also require us to notify all parents in writing within 48 hours of becoming aware that a child or employee has contracted an illness deemed notifiable by the DSHS.

Return to School Policy

Following an illness, a child may return to school once the child is free of symptoms of illness for 24 hours (without the use of medication) or you have obtained a health care professional's statement that the child no longer has an excludable disease or condition.

Initial _____

Medical Emergencies

In the case of a medical emergency, we will:

- Call 9-1-1;
- Administer medication, CPR and/or first aid as needed; and,
- Call the child's parent(s)/caregiver(s).

We keep a First Aid kit in a labeled, designated location, accessible only to adults, in our environment. For minor accidents, such as scrapes and bumps, we will administer first aid as needed and share details of the accident with you directly or via an Accident Report. An Incident Report will be filed and reported to Licensing if emergency medical service is required. Jessica is trained in First Aid and CPR.

Western Oaks Montessori will not dispense medication to children.

Emergency Preparedness Plan

Western Oaks Montessori is equipped with smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, and a fire extinguisher. Fire and Emergency Drills are conducted according to state regulations. Fire drills are performed monthly and severe weather drills are practiced four times per year.

Procedures during Emergencies

A. In case of Severe Weather, Thunderstorms or Tornadoes the following procedures will be followed:

1. When the siren is heard, Jessica will prepare the children for safety and take the Contact Log (which has the student's emergency and medical information).
2. Evacuation Procedure: Children will go immediately to the designated area located inside the home for safety. When assembled, this group will take a crouch position with hands covering their head.
3. Jessica will take a head count during the group's gathering to make sure all children are in the designated place of safety.
4. Jessica will ensure all doors are closed in classrooms and lights out after having children properly grouped.
5. Jessica will be alert and attentive to the children.
6. When the warning is lifted and it is safe for movement, Jessica will inform the children that they may resume activity.

Initial _____

B. In Case Of Fire or Explosion the following procedures will be followed:

1. When the siren is heard, Jessica will prepare the children for safety and take Contact Log (which has student's emergency and medical information).
2. Evacuation Procedures: Jessica will follow the Evacuation Route that has been practiced from the Monthly Fire Drills from their designated areas. Jessica will take the children outside the home and to the easement located at the intersection of Spivey Drive and Amanda Ellis.
3. Jessica will take a headcount after children have gathered at the designated place of safety.

If a child becomes injured or ill during the evacuation or emergency process, the parent will be notified immediately. If parents cannot be reached, emergency contacts will be notified.

If there is an emergency situation and it becomes necessary to close the school, parents will be notified from the primary contact information on file to make arrangements for early pick-up.

Animals

Animals reside at Western Oaks Montessori. The dog is up to date on all vaccinations and in good health. A copy of their vaccination records are on file and you may request to review them. The dog will not interact with the children during the school day, unless parental permission is given. The snails are classroom pets. Children will be responsible for feeding the snails, but will not hold the snails.

Drop-Off & Pick-Up Policies

To minimize disruptions to our daily routines, we ask that you utilize the drop-off and pick-up windows which are designed to provide you with ample time for a smooth transition for your child.

The front door will be unlocked and the front hallway light turned on between 8:30am - 8:45am. Please have your child walk inside fully clothed and ready for the day and sign them in daily. In order to keep the environment free of distractions, we ask that you finish all phone calls before entering the environment. Goodbyes should be prompt, positive, and peaceful.

Children in the half-day program must be picked up between 11:50am-12:00pm. Full day children must be picked up between 2:50pm - 3:00pm. I will wait by the side gate (to the right of the house) with your child during pick-up times. If any person other than a parent or designated driver is to pick up a child, advance written notice must be given.

Initial _____

Children in the half-day program picked up later than 12:00pm will be charged \$1/minute which will be added to the next month's invoice. **Late pick-up disrupts the serving of lunch for the full day children.**

Children in the full day program picked up later than 3:00pm will be charged \$1/minute which will be added to the next month's invoice. **Late pick-ups disrupts my own child's pick-up from her school.**

Children will only be released to the persons listed in the Student Information Form unless there is written documentation. An email or a written note including the adult's name and the date they will be picking up your child will be required. If we are not familiar with the adult, we may ask for identification to verify. Safety is our top priority.

Once your child has been picked up for the day, we ask that you leave the premises **immediately**. If you and your child would like to spend time with other families after school, Western Oaks Montessori respectfully asks that you find a place to do it away from the front yard and our neighbors' yard(s). We want to always be respectful of our neighbors so that they are happy to have our school next door. There is an amazing park (Dick Nichols Park) and a trail (Latta Branch Greenbelt) just down the street that is a great spot to socialize.

Daily Community Schedule

8:30am-8:45am: Drop off

8:30am-10:45am: Montessori work cycle (snack will be provided during this time)

10:50am-11:50: Outdoor free time

11:50am-12:00pm: Pick-up for half day children

12:00pm-1:00pm: Lunch Rituals (this includes set up and clean up)

1:00pm-1:30pm: Rest Time (Optional nap or quiet time for child)

1:30pm-2:00pm: Nap time//Work Period for those awake

2:00pm-2:50pm: Outdoor free time

2:50pm-3:00pm: Pick-up for full day children

Initial _____

Clothing & Shoes

Your child should be dressed in comfortable clothes and shoes that they can self-manage. Clothes and shoes (closed-toed) should be appropriate for running, jumping, climbing, playing and not distracting to the community. While clothes with franchised characters (ex: Disney) are fun to wear, they are distracting in our environment. Please reserve such clothing for weekends or after school. Although aprons are worn for some activities to protect clothing, please realize this does not always prevent clothes from becoming stained. Wet or soiled clothes will be sent home; please replenish as needed.

The children move around the environment quite a bit, working on rugs, on the floor, or outside on the deck. They are welcome to bring and keep indoor shoes for this purpose. The slipper moccasins from Hanna Anderson are comfortable and flexible.

All items must be labeled with your child's name.

Outdoor Time

Licensed programs are required to provide two daily opportunities for outdoor play for a minimum of 60 total minutes daily, weather permitting. Children in the program are required to do a specific amount of moderate to vigorous play each day; their clothing and shoes must allow the child to participate safely in physical activities. Activities include running, playing sports, engaging in various games, climbing on the geodome, gardening, and dancing.

Children will be outdoors daily unless severe weather occurs. Please ensure your child is dressed appropriately for the weather. In the event of severe weather, children will have the opportunity for active playtime indoors such as yoga, dancing, building, and indoor obstacle courses.

Children are also invited to work outside during the morning work cycle depending on their maturity. We kindly request that you apply both insect repellent and sunscreen to your child as needed before sending them to school. We also request that you send a labeled bottle of sunscreen and bug spray to school so we can reapply if needed.

Food & Allergies

Meal times provide opportunities for children to enjoy pleasant conversation and good food. It is a time to refine manners. Meal times are set up beautifully with placemats, plates, and cloth napkins. The children enjoy learning to prepare, serve, and clear away after a meal. For lunch, they learn to wait for everyone to be ready before beginning to eat. The children are helped to peel and pour for themselves. They also learn to offer help to one another and to request, accept, and decline help as needed.

Initial _____

Breakfast

Please provide your child with a nutritious breakfast each morning before dropping them off at school. Good nutrition directly affects a child's health, concentration, and behavior.

Snack

Children are offered a healthy morning snack each day and may choose if and when they would like to eat. Snack is typically prepared by the children as part of their morning work cycle.

Lunch

We ask that each child bring their lunch from home in a well-insulated lunch bag (free of cartoons and/or characters). We are unable to warm lunches, so any warm food should be brought in a thermos. Each child is encouraged to eat only as much as their hunger requires, although generous time is provided. When a child is through eating, they wrap uneaten food and return it to their bag or box. This allows families to make changes as needed. Cores, pits, and peelings are put in the compost bucket.

We ask that you help your child to always pack a well-balanced meal. If you need ideas, we are happy to provide resources. Please note we have a no dessert policy. Any sweets sent to school will be returned to enjoy at home.

The children will have access to drinking water at all times. We provide glass cups indoors and request that you send a labeled water bottle for your child which will stay at school for use outdoors.

If your child has specific dietary restrictions or needs of which we should be aware, please indicate so on your Admissions Information Form.

Allergies

For the safety of our children, we reserve the right to implement food restrictions if we discover that a member of our community has a severe, diagnosed food allergy.

It is your responsibility to inform us in writing on your Admissions Information form of any food allergies or sensitivities that your child has and to inform us in writing if there are any changes to your child's health or diet.

Initial _____

Quiet time

Because the children are stimulated throughout the day, they will have an opportunity to rest after lunch. They may take a nap or simply rest while looking at a book or doing a simple activity on their mat. Families supply a sleeping mat, small pillow, and a covering (sheet/blanket).

Discipline & Behavior Management

The Montessori environment is designed to meet the developmental needs of children and allow them to be emotionally, socially, and academically stimulated and challenged. “Misbehavior” is a sign that the child has a need not being met. As Montessorians, our greatest tool is observation. We observe the child to see how we can meet the child’s needs respectfully using Montessorian principles.

Because respect is a cornerstone of the Montessori philosophy, **we will not address any questions or concerns you may have about your child in their presence.** Jessica will be happy to discuss any concerns or questions via email or a scheduled telephone call.

School Wide Events

Western Oaks Montessori hosts 2 school wide events, a fall celebration and a spring celebration. Our school events are a wonderful way for the community to come together and enjoy each other’s company.

Celebration of Life

Birthdays can be a big deal to children! They love to hear their journey from birth to present day and how their presence has made life beautiful for their family and friends. We want to celebrate each child and acknowledge their being in our world in a way that is simple, yet profound. In our environment, we will use a sun, the months of the year, a candle, and a globe to help show the passage of time from birth to present day. We will celebrate all summer birthdays during the last week of school.

In preparation for this celebration, each child will make a small “book” with their family that I will read aloud to the group. The “book” can be an album, a journal, or simply loose photos with a caption written on the back. Please send the book at least a day in advance so I can review before I share with the children.

Initial _____

The book will have the following:

- 1 picture for each year of life
- 2-3 sentences that describe each year of life or the picture

This is meant to be a fun (not stressful!) activity for the family. Spend some time looking at old photos and ask the child to choose a picture that represents a favorite memory. If the child is able to write, they can write a sentence or two - and it doesn't have to be perfect! Children love to take charge and what better way for them to take ownership of their celebration book! This book will stay in the environment for a day or two for the children to enjoy, and then sent home.

If your child would like, they may bring in a healthy treat to share with the group for morning snack or lunch. You will receive more information several weeks prior to your child's birthday.

Other Celebrations

We understand and respect that each family has their own traditions surrounding holidays. In an effort to raise awareness of other cultures, we may share stories, songs, games, and crafts with the children. We would love to include any traditions your family celebrates! Please email us in advance so we can work together to introduce these celebrations in a developmentally appropriate way for the children.

Contact Information

Jessica Whinery

Address: 7509 Spivey Dr. Austin, Texas 78749

Email: westernoaksmontessori@gmail.com

Phone number: 903-239-2324

Instagram: [@westernoaksmontessoriatx](https://www.instagram.com/westernoaksmontessoriatx)

We look forward to creating beautiful memories with you and your family.

This handbook is subject to change. Updated March 2024.

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