

School Culture [14 Del. C. § 512(6)-(7) and 14 Del. C. §4112D]

1. Describe the culture or ethos of the proposed school,...

SMS will use the Responsive Classroom Approach to develop a consistent and coherent positive school environment across the school community. This approach is based on seven guiding principles:

- The social and emotional curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
- How children learn is as important as what they learn.
- Great cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
- To be successful academically and socially, children need to learn a set of social and emotional skills: cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
- Knowing the children we teach—individually, culturally, and developmentally—is as important as knowing the content we teach.
- Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children we teach.
- How we, the adults at school, work together is as important as our individual competence: Lasting change begins with the adult community.

This research based approach has been shown to positively impact student achievement, improve teacher-student interactions, and increase the amount of time children are engaged in the classroom (Rim-Kaufman, S., 2006). The Responsive Classroom is characterized by four main pillars which are likewise the basic pillars of a Montessori Classroom:

- Engaging Academics - Teachers create learning tasks that are active, interactive, appropriately challenging, purposeful, and connected to students' interests.
- Positive Community - Teachers nurture a sense of belonging, significance, and emotional safety so that students feel comfortable taking risks and working with a variety of peers.
- Effective Management- Teachers create a calm, orderly environment that promotes autonomy and allows students to focus on learning.
- Developmental Awareness - Teachers use knowledge of child development, along with observations of students, to create a developmentally appropriate learning environment.

In particular, The Responsive Classroom approach provides a framework for the social climate of the Montessori classroom and school. The Responsive Classroom C.A.R.E.S. (Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy and Self Control) will guide interactions across the school community fostering a positive and healthy learning environment based on:

- Respect and appreciation for what each member contributes to the community.
- Mutual respect and trust in communications, no matter what our roles may be.
- Teamwork and support of each other in our personnel growth.

References

Rim-Kaufman, S. (2006). *Social and Academic Learning Study on the Contribution of the Responsive Classroom Approach*. Curry School Of Education And Center For Advanced Study Of Teaching And Learning: University Of Virginia. Retrieved October 24, 2011, from http://www.responsiveclassroom.org/sites/default/files/pdf_files/sals_booklet_rc.pdf .

2. Explain the systems, practices, and traditions that the School Leader and staff will implement to foster this culture ...

The Responsive Classroom approach provides a structure of systems, practices, and traditions that the SMS teachers and school leaders will draw from. These range from classroom practices to school wide practices. These practices help children to feel safe in school. When children know routines, what to expect and when to expect it they develop confidence in themselves.

Classroom Practices:

- Morning Greetings – each child will be greeted at the classroom door by the teacher who shakes the child’s hand, is at eye level with the child, and welcomes them to the classroom.
- Morning Meeting – each classroom will begin the day using the Responsive Classroom structure for Morning Meeting which allows children and teachers to transition from home to school.
- Developing Rules – each classroom will develop rules using the Responsive Classroom approach tying rules to each child’s goal for learning. At most, classrooms will have three to five rules based on the idea of taking care of each other, taking care of yourself, and taking care of the environment. These rules mesh exactly with Maria Montessori’s goals for children in schools.
- Interactive Modeling – teachers will be trained in this explicit practice to teach procedures and routines across the school year.
- Logical Consequences – teachers will work to help students learn from their mistakes by helping them to maintain their dignity. Punishment is not an option in a Montessori classroom.
- Quiet times and spaces – the day will be structured with quiet spaces that allow for purposeful and relaxed transitions.
- Closing Circle – Each day will close with a brief gathering at the end of the day to reflect and celebrate the accomplishments from the day.

Sample School Wide Practices

- School Wide Gatherings – the school leadership will work with the teachers to determine a pattern (weekly, biweekly, monthly) for school wide gatherings. These gatherings include the components of a morning meeting school wide. Different classrooms may take a leadership role in the school wide gatherings.
- Montessori Schools value and celebrate diversity. The school leadership and teachers at SMS will determine several cultural celebrations to focus on throughout the year based on the children and their families.
- Greeting children as they enter the school – the school leader or other adult when necessary will greet children as they enter the school community each day.

- A focus on how we talk to children. The adults in the school will engage in a school-wide focus on the use of empowering language with children developing an understanding of the power of their words to shape the culture of the school community.

References:

<https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>

3. Describe the key elements of the school’s bullying prevention and anti-hazing ... Sussex Montessori encourages students to show respect for differences in others, including but not limited to race, gender, and religion while fostering a school environment free from all forms of bullying and intimidation. As described above, the Montessori approach combined with the Responsive Classroom approach is designed to create an environment that proactively reduces bullying. Because a Montessori School focuses on the social curriculum equally with the academic curriculum, bullying is minimized. However, this does not mean that it does not exist. Sussex Montessori’s commitment is to:

- Encourage non-violent communication.
- Encourage teachers to embody peaceful programs against bullying and violence in their classroom curriculum in order to develop a positive educational approach to minimize such behavior.
- Encourage parents to work as a member of a peaceful team with teachers, staff, other parents, and administration to resolve issues in a way that respects the individual needs of all children and adults involved.
- Respect the privacy of student and family information, including discipline issues.
- Discuss appropriate standards of behavior and school rules with all students.
- Involve the other agencies as necessary.

While Montessori schools do not tolerate bullying and teachers take actions immediately to address such situation, they also understand that this is an opportunity to teach. SMS teachers will teach children what bullying looks and sounds like and how to address it whether they are in school or in the community around the school. Because Peace Education is an integral part of the Montessori curriculum, SMS will focus on how to solve problems in a peaceful way rather than through bullying or violence. Specifically, the school will use the Responsive Classroom structure of class meetings and interactive modeling to provide a framework for how to address various situations children may find themselves involved in including: physical bullying, verbal bullying, and cyber bullying. Specifically, SMS will work to prevent bullying by:

- Ensuring that all adults in the school community understand what constitutes bullying
- Ensuring that all adults in the school community understand that they have a responsibility to stop bullying
- Explicitly teaching and providing opportunities for children to practice kind and respectful behavior and language.
- Teaching about bullying school wide, classroom wide, and to individual children.
- Empowering children to stop bullying with words that will support them in redirecting a situation.

In addition, SMS will follow all state required protocols for observing, intervening, and reporting incidences of bullying. We will include specific information about bullying and the state requirements for addressing bullying in the student handbook. We will require all employees, and encourage parents, to report any known incidents of bullying or willful or deliberate violence to their child's teacher and/or the Head of School within 24 hours. When such an incident is observed, employees are required to complete an Incident Report and to send copies to the Head of School. Families of the children involved in bullying or willful violence will be notified. Incidents of normal peer conflict may or may not be reported, depending on the details and events. Finally, we will participate in the required training each year as required by Title 14 Delaware Code 4123A.

4. Explain how the school culture will serve and support students with special needs, including students receiving special education services, English Language Learners, homeless and migrant students, and any other students at-risk of academic failure.

Peer relationships are very important in the Montessori approach. We strive to have students understand cultural aspects of other students and respect these aspects as they interact. In fact, we look at these aspects as assets to be used to create understanding in differences of culture, abilities and skills, language, living environment, and behaviors. Because of this, as outlined in the research cited earlier, Montessori public schools are experiencing success with at risk children who can progress at their pace, feel supported in an inviting child centered classroom, and develop a sense of self-efficacy that stands them well as they move beyond the school. As mentioned above, SMS will be replicating the Responsive Classroom Approach, a research-based approach to K-8 teaching that focuses on the strong link between academic success and social-emotional learning (SEL) which supports all children to be successful in the school community.