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# **STEELE MONTESSORI ACADEMY**

**Parent/Guardian Handbook  
2021-2022**

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**Welcome to Steele Montessori Academy. We are delighted you have chosen our school as an educational home for your child and just as pleased to be serving your entire family through San Antonio's first public Montessori school. This handbook is a further effort to work together in the interest of children and families.**

**We invite you to familiarize yourself with this Family Handbook and to use it as a reference tool. If you have questions, please ask. If you have suggestions, we welcome them. We welcome you and your children to a year of discovery and growth!**

**Sincerely,**

**Laura Christenberry  
Principal**

## About Steele Montessori Academy

### Our Vision

Steele Montessori Academy will establish a community where ALL students have access to a Montessori education. Our students will be intentional, empathetic, adaptable, creative and independent. Students will take initiative to care for themselves, each other, and the world around them.

### What we believe

- We believe that being in the present moment can help us focus better and bring us peace to our well-being.
- We believe we all are reflective learners who set meaningful goals for themselves.
- We believe that school is a joyful student-centered place to spend your day.
- We believe that the Earth is precious and full of resources that we must ethically manage.
- We believe that all children deserve access to a free and public Montessori education.
- We believe authentic and challenging work gives us a sense of purpose.
- We ARE deeply passionate and engaged in the work that we do. We do meaningful work that contributes to our community.
- We live in harmony with one another and treat each other with grace and courtesy.

### Facts

- We are a 50/50 campus. This means that we intentionally admit 50% of our students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and 50% from non economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- We are an inclusion campus for students with special needs. We have many students that have a variety of special needs that have found Steele Montessori to be home.
- We have multi-age classes and students generally will stay with the same teacher for a 3 year period. Primary includes students in PreK 3, PreK4, and Kindergarten, Lower Elementary includes students in 1<sup>st</sup> grade, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and Upper Elementary includes students in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Our Montessori guides are trained through AMS, AMI, or MACTE.
- We are the only public Montessori school in Bexar County. We believe Montessori education should be accessible to all.

## Montessori Education

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Montessori education is named after Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian doctor and educator who, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, created a model based on the study of children. Montessori schools began in 1907 as part of an urban renewal effort. The first “school,” in fact, was a single classroom on the ground floor of a housing project. Very quickly, the movement spread from Italy to the United States, where the earliest schools began operating around 1910. Today there are hundreds of thousands of Montessori schools operating on six continents, with over 500 public options in the United States alone.

Montessori education is based on careful scientific observation of how children learn and grow. By observing young children, Dr. Montessori discovered their natural abilities to concentrate, explore, discover, and learn about the world around them. Over the next forty years of her life, she continued to experiment and invent new materials and methods. Today, children in Montessori schools all over the world learn and grow to their full potential.

### How Montessori education works

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Montessori works by offering children choices and activities that motivate them to engage deeply and work independently. Montessori classrooms are carefully prepared environments stocked with unique educational materials and teachers who have been specially trained to assist children in exploring, concentrating and mastering key academic as well as social and emotional skills.

Montessori classrooms look different from regular classrooms. The Montessori method includes some special elements:

- **Mixed-age classrooms:** Children are in the same classroom, with the same teacher, for three years. Younger children learn from older ones, and everyone can learn at their own pace.
- **Uninterrupted work periods:** Children have long periods of time to follow their interests and work independently, building concentration and focus.
- **Montessori materials:** The Montessori materials are ingenious in that they are both attractive to the child and designed to support deep exploration of important concepts.
- **Real-world activities:** The classrooms include real-world activities such as caring for plants and animals, keeping the room clean and organized, and preparing and serving food. Children love engaging in real activities, and, in addition to becoming responsible members of the classroom community, the skills they practice – attention, focus, coordination – set the stage for more advanced academic work.
- **Montessori trained teachers:** Montessori teachers – called “guides,” -- take additional training to learn the use of the materials and to study how children learn. Teachers typically give lessons to one child at a time or a small group, while the other children work independently, supervised by a classroom assistant.
- **Children choose their own work:** Within the limits set by the teacher and the classroom, children have a high level of independence and responsibility. At the same time, teachers spend a lot of time observing their classes carefully, which is necessary to support children in making responsible choices.

## The Primary Program – Ages 3-6

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The primary program, also known as the Children's House, serves children from approximately three to six years of age. The environment is carefully prepared using Montessori principles that allow the children to choose work according to their interests and developmental level. The Montessori guide initially presents the specially designed Montessori educational materials. Each child works at his own pace, repeating activities, making choices, and developing abilities through exploration of his work. Indirect learning occurs as children observe the work of others and, in turn, share what they have learned with their classmates. In this way, children explore concepts of literacy, numeracy, geography, music, art, and care of self and the environment.

## The Elementary Program – Ages 6-12

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The elementary program serves children between the ages of six and twelve. Many of the design features of the primary continue to the elementary – enriched, hands-on, orderly materials, emphasis on independence, and so on. Only now, the child is capable of more advanced work in the disciplines. The interdisciplinary curriculum invites children to deep engagement with questions related to the laws of nature, the organization of societies, and the development knowledge in the key content areas: history, geography, botany, zoology, biology, geometry, literature, and Mathematics.

## Further Reading

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To learn more about Montessori education, we suggest the following:

Books by Maria Montessori

Most books available by Dr. Montessori are actually transcribed lectures from her many training courses. *The Montessori Method* and *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* were prepared especially for readers interested in learning about her pedagogical approach. Most titles are available through commercial booksellers; others can be obtained through the North American Montessori Teachers Association.

- *The Absorbent Mind*
- *The Secret of Childhood*
- *The Discovery of the Child*
- *Education and Peace*
- *Education for a New World*
- *To Educate the Human Potential*
- *From Childhood to Adolescence*

Books Related to the Montessori Experience

- Michael Duffy, *Math Works: Montessori Math and the Developing Brain*
- David Kahn (Ed.), *Montessori Talks to Parents*
- Rita Kramer, *Maria Montessori: A Biography*
- Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori Today: A Comprehensive Approach to Education from Birth to Adulthood*
- Lynn Jessen and Paula Polk Lillard, *Montessori from the Start: The Child at Home from Birth to Age Three*
- Angeline Stoll Lillard, *Montessori: The Science Behind the Genius*
- Aline Wolf, *Peaceful Children, Peaceful World: The Challenge of Maria Montessori*

Recommended Books on Childrearing and Family Life

- Robert Evans, *Family Matters: How Schools Can Cope With the Crisis in Childrearing*
- Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk; Siblings without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too*

- Jane Healy, *Failure to Connect: How Computers Affect our Children's Minds – And What We Can Do About It*
- Wendy Mogel, *The Blessing of a Skinned Knee: Using Jewish Teachings to Raise Self-Reliant Children*
- Jane Nelson, *Positive Discipline: The Classic Guide to Helping Children Develop Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation, and Problem Solving Skills*
- Sally Shaywitz, *Overcoming Dyslexia: A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at any Level*

#### Libros en Español

por Maria Montessori

- *La mente absorbente*
- *El niño: secreto de la infancia*
- *Formación del hombre*
- *La educación de las potenciales*

#### Otros autores

- Silvana Montanaro, *Un ser humano: La importancia de los primeros tres años de vida*
- Mario Montessori, *La educación para el desarrollo humano*
- Aline Wolf, *Cómo cultivar el espíritu del niño en un ambiente laico*
- Aline Wolf, *Una guía para padres al aula Montessori*

For these books or for assistance in locating other books in Spanish, contact:

Rittchell Yau, Consejo Interamericano Montessori 1203 Pacific Drive, Davis, CA 95616 530-758-6340;  
cite@pacbell.net.

#### Useful Catalogs

The Michael Olaf Montessori Company publishes beautiful and informative catalogs containing Montessori-compatible books, toys, clothing, and other materials.

- The Joyful Child, for Birth to Three
- Child of the World, for Age 3-12 +

#### Useful Websites

- [www.montessori-ami.org](http://www.montessori-ami.org)
- <https://amshq.org/>
- [www.montessoriconnections.com](http://www.montessoriconnections.com)
- [www.montessori.namta.org](http://www.montessori.namta.org)
- [www.public-montessori.org](http://www.public-montessori.org)
- <http://www.michaelolaf.net/>

## General Information

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### Attendance

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Children who benefit most from the prepared environment are those who come to school every day. A consistent routine provides security for children, and a sense of security enables children to learn more readily. Because experiences in the classroom and with the materials are cumulative; consistent attendance is necessary for your child to take full advantage of all the environment has to offer.

Likewise, your own commitment to your child's presence in school affirms the importance of school and learning, and demonstrates trust in the environment for your child, which aids in healthy separation and happiness at school. Please make every effort to ensure your child's regular attendance. We specifically request that you:

Please schedule family vacations and trips to coincide with school holidays.

Schedule appointments with the doctor, dentist, orthodontist, or other professionals outside of classroom hours.

### Absence

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If your child must miss school, please call the school office at 210-438-6870 to report your child's absence. If the office staff is not available please leave a message including your child's name, teacher's name and the reason for absence. To ensure all students absent from school are accounted for, absences that are not reported are checked by calls to home, parent's work, and other numbers listed on the student's verification form if necessary. Please make certain these phone numbers are always current and working. Once your child returns to school, please send a note to excuse the absence. Absences are excused for illness, religious reasons, or bereavement.

### Tardiness

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School begins at 8:00am. All children arriving after 8:05 are considered late. Following Dr. Montessori's observation that all work has a beginning, middle, and end, we expect all students to arrive at School and be picked up on time. It is not an overstatement to say that a child deprived of the proper beginning by a late arrival is deprived of the most important part of his or her school day. Lateness tends to make the child feel left out because work has started without him or her.

The parent/guardian is required to sign in the child if he/she is entering the school after 8:00 am. The sign-in book is located on the front desk in the main office. The child will take a late pass and go to the classroom.



## Arrival and Dismissal

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### School Day Schedule

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Arrival	7:30 – 8:00 am
Car-line drop-off	7:30 – 8:00 am
Late arrivals (please check in at the front desk)	8:05 am
Afternoon dismissal	3:20 pm

### Arrival Procedures

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The school building will be open at 7:30 a.m. daily with supervision beginning at 7:30 a.m. All students, parents, and visitors must enter through the front doors on Broadbent. All other doors will remain locked including the exit by the gym. Students should be instructed not to open doors at any time – even if an adult/parent wants to get into the building. Any student who arrives after 8:05 will be tardy.

If student is being dropped off in our carpool line, the parent will need to drive to the next available cone and wait until a staff member comes to the car to assist the student in getting out.

### Dismissal Procedures

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**Bus Riders-** At 3:15, a designated teacher will come to each class to pick up any students on her “bus list” and walk them to the bus. Students will need to have their tag with bus number on their backpack at all times. The teacher will wait with the students for the bus to ensure that each student boards the correct bus.

**Carpool Pick-Up-** We strongly encourage our parents to use our carpool system as we strive to make it the most efficient way to pick-up your child. You must sign-up in the main office to receive your carpool tags. Each family will receive two large numbered tags to be placed in their windshield and one small tag per child to be pinned on their backpack. We will escort your child to the car once you pull up. You will need to stay in the carpool line until we release the next set of cars.

**Parent Pick-Up/Walking in-** Children who are not being picked up via carpool will be waiting outside by the steps to the library with their teacher. You will need to wait and sign your child out with the teacher before taking your child. \*In the event of rain, we will be dismissing in the main office. Please still use the library doors.

### Calendar

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The school calendar is included in the Appendix.

## Celebrations

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### Birthdays

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Birthdays are important milestones in a child's development, and each classroom has its own rituals for honoring these moments within the classroom. Please contact your child's teacher, in advance, to learn what the guidelines are for any parent involvement.

Please do not distribute invitations at school for parties that will exclude certain students. To avoid hurt feelings, please mail invitations separately.

### Holidays

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We treat holidays of many cultures and religions as cultural festivals, and recognize such events in each class mainly from an educational point of view. Significant classroom time is generally not devoted to holidays. However, parents/guardians are invited to make a presentation or lead an activity related to a particular holiday and its customs. Please contact your child's teacher if you are interested in leading the class in a holiday celebration.

### Excluding your child from celebrations

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Should you wish to exclude your child from an activity, notify your child's teacher at the beginning of the school year or in advance of the celebration. A written note to the teacher regarding the exclusion of your child's participation is required.

### Dress Code

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The Steele Montessori Academy uniform is a white, black, or red polo shirt and black, khaki, or denim slacks. In addition, we offer the following guidelines.

**Clothing:** Children should wear comfortable, functional clothing suited to the season. Children need to be able to work comfortably in the classroom, and to run easily and play outside. No flip flops or sandals.

**\*\*We go outside in all weather, so children should be prepared for hot, cold, or wet conditions, including appropriate clothing and footwear. Involving your child as much as possible in choosing clothing and dressing supports his or her independence.\*\***

Please mark all hats, gloves, coats, boots, sweaters, and extra set of clothing with your child's name. Lost and Found is located in the main office. Any unclaimed items will be donated at the end of the school year.

**Independence:** Even the youngest children should be able to manipulate all fastenings on their clothing so that trips to the bathroom go smoothly. Bulky belts, unwieldy zippers, cumbersome overalls, tight snaps, and other difficult closures make the child's independent bathroom experience difficult if not impossible. Please also choose coats, jackets, and sweaters with the child's comfort and abilities in mind. Giving your child time to practice with clothing fasteners will promote independence at school.

## Items at School

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### Electronic Devices

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iPods, cell phones, etc. are not permitted at school. Steele Montessori Academy students must have a signed permission slip to have a cell phone at school. Copies are available in the main office. Children who carry phones as they travel to and from school must drop them off at the front desk on arrival. Students may pick up their phones from the front desk at the end of the day as they depart. Cell phones are NOT permitted in the classroom.

### Toys and Precious Items:

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These are not permitted at school. Toys can greatly detract from the classroom's atmosphere of calm and ordered learning, so please avoid bringing them to school. Also, please refrain from sending your children with precious items such as special clothing and jewelry. These may be lost or damaged which can lead to great disappointment. Inappropriate items will be held until the end of the school day and then returned.

### Homework

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Students work hard and long while they are at school. As a general rule, we promote family time for children when they are at home. While traditional assignments are rare for all students, we do encourage families to involve their children in the daily tasks of home life. Tasks such as making the bed, setting the table, loading the dishwasher, helping care for the family help children of all ages learn important life skills, as well as participate in daily family life. Daily reading should be a part of every child's at-home routine.

**Primary:** There is no homework for children in the Primary classrooms. We strongly urge that all children have a minimum of 30 minutes of reading time with an adult at home.

**Elementary:** Assigned homework is minimal in the Montessori Elementary program. However, students are often involved in projects that require research and attention beyond the classroom. Students should have appropriate responsibilities in the home and ample opportunities for participation in family life, outdoor play, and other activities. Reading, of course, continues to be an important part of every student's routine.

### Assessment and Testing

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Steele Montessori Academy uses a comprehensive assessment protocol, comprised of the following:

Daily & Weekly Documentation	Observation and Tracking of Engagement in the Prepared Environment for individual children as well as the entire class
Quarterly Progress Reporting	Individual tracking and reporting of the child's progress in the Montessori Prepared Environment, with a focus on Executive Functioning, Social/Emotional Development and Academic Learning
Annual Assessment of Growth	Steele uses NWEA MAP, STAAR Assessments

## Special Education

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Steele Montessori Academy is committed to meeting the social, emotional, and intellectual needs of every student. The Montessori Program is inherently individualized and based on ongoing observation, consultation, and differentiation of instruction. To support this key element of our program, we employ a team approach to isolating difficulties early and take concerted steps to resolve those difficulties before they become significant obstacles to learning. Steele Montessori uses an **Inclusion Model** for all students who qualify for special education services to the maximum extent possible. We emphasize keeping students in the Least Restrictive Environment in accordance with the student's IEP which is held annually. We do not offer any self-contained units and do provide services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, and academic support. For more information on our special education services please contact Crystal Hillhouse and [chillhouse1@saisd.net](mailto:chillhouse1@saisd.net).

## Family Partnership

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At Steele we view education as a partnership between the school and the family, and each member has a part to play. We find that our best relationships with families are based in a common understanding of what we can expect of one another. When school and home work in harmony, children thrive. We invite families to join with the school to support children's development. The table below summarizes our mutual commitments and expectations

What you can Expect of the School	What the School Expects of Families
<i>Montessori Education</i> You can expect us to work to fully implement Montessori education according to nationally recognized standards. This includes the Montessori curriculum and approach, but also a general culture of respect for children, their natural development, and their growing independence.	Families can help the school by understanding and working with the Montessori approach, and by supporting their children's independence at home. Parents can learn more about Montessori by attending parent education events and parent-teacher conference, and by observing in classrooms.
<i>Collaboration</i> You can expect us to work with families to reach the best outcome for children, providing support as needed so every child can succeed	Families can partner with the school, collaborating on solutions and supporting their children's full development.
<i>School Environment</i> You can expect us to provide a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment for children, families, and staff.	Families can uphold the values of safety and respect.
<i>Communication</i> You can expect us to communicate clearly and directly with families about all matters of importance regarding the school and children.	Families can communicate clearly and directly with the school. Please reach out to your child's teacher with any concerns. Families are encouraged to read school emails and communication, to respond and ask questions as needed, and to attend parent and family events, or just drop by.

## Communication

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We take communication very seriously. Robust, two-way communication between home and school is the cornerstone of a healthy community, because it provides the foundation for trust, understanding and collaboration.

## The Basics

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**Telephone:** Families can call the school at (210) 438-6870 during school hours (from 7:30 to 4:00 when school is open).

**Contacting Teachers by E-mail/Text Communication:** All Steele Montessori staff members are available by e-mail. You should expect to hear from your child's teacher within the first two weeks of school. Likewise, we invite you to be in touch at anytime with questions, or concerns about your child's work at school. Teachers are generally available to respond to e-mail **before and after school hours and during their conference period.**

**Emergency Contact:** Should there be an emergency, the school will first contact parent 1, then parent 2. If we cannot contact either parents, we will begin contacting the emergency contacts in order listed on the Emergency Contact Card. Please keep this card up to date. If you need to add anyone to the emergency card, the parent will need to notify the office in person.

**School Closures:** Please check our school website and your text messages for information related to school closures.

**Monthly Newsletter:** Our monthly newsletter posted on our school website by the first Friday of each month. This newsletter details upcoming events as well as highlights what is happening throughout the month at Steele Montessori Academy.

**Family Folders:** Each student will have a designated Family Folder that will go home each Monday with flyers, permission slips, forms, and announcements. Please check the child's folder each weekend and return it on Tuesday.

## Opportunities for Deeper Communication

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**Parent-Teacher Conferences:** Parent-Teacher Conferences are the best way for parents to speak with teachers about what is happening with their children in school. We will have 2 designated parent-teacher conference days-one in the fall, after the first 9 weeks and the other in the spring after the 3<sup>rd</sup> nine weeks. Other parent-teacher conferences are had on an as needed basis.

**Progress Reports:** Progress reports are distributed four times a year. These reports are detailed summaries of how your child is developing within the Montessori prepared environment. Focus is on interest, exploration, and mastery. Twice a year progress reports are accompanied by conferences.

**Parent Education:** Every First Thursday of the Month is designated for parent education. This is an important time for you to gain insight into how Montessori education works, how to implement Montessori principles into your home, and give you a chance to ask any burning questions. We often provide childcare at these events so you can be free to focus on the content of the meeting.

**Classroom Observation:** Observing in a classroom is the very best way to learn about the Montessori approach. Observations can be scheduled through the main office by calling **(210) 438-6870**. During the observation, the adult sits quietly and unobtrusively in the classroom while the day's activities proceed. Detailed information about observations is available from the office.

\*Please note that we do not allow any outside visitors during the first 6 weeks of school.

**"Watch Me Work" Events:** Three times a year you will be invited to join your child for a 30 minute visit to the classroom. This event takes place in the evening, and it is an opportunity for your child to orient you to his/her community, show you work s/he is engaged in, and share his/her learning experience with you.

## First Contacts

Concern or Question	First Contact
Child's academic, emotional, and social progress; questions about lessons	Classroom teacher
Special needs, individualized educational program (IEP), 504 plans, and behavior concerns	Crystal, Assistant Principal
Montessori pedagogy, curriculum, assessment; suggestions for a Montessori-inspired home environment	Pat, Instructional Coach
Volunteers, community events, school-home communication	Linda, Parent/Family Coordinator
School policies, strategic direction, educational mission	Laura, Principal
Enrollment questions, notice of absences, late arrival, and early pick-up; authorization for medical treatment in school; allergies and dietary restrictions	Rebecca, Data Clerk

## Getting Started at Steele Montessori Academy

### Student Placement and Transitions

Continuity is a hallmark of the Montessori experience. Mixed age classrooms allow students to develop stable relationships with adults and peers over a three-year cycle. The stability enables security and growth, as the child's role within the group evolves over time from being among the youngest to a community elder. Mixed age grouping also honors the unique pace at which each child develops, a process which does not always correspond to chronological age.

Because we appreciate the importance of continuity and consistency in healthy human development, we take special care in supporting children as they move through several key transitions during their time at Steele Montessori Academy. Transitions are always monitored by Steele staff in consultation with you.

## The Primary Program

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The first transition takes place when children leave home to become members of their first classroom. We assist families in establishing a trusting relationship with our teachers. For most children this takes place between 30 and 36 months. Independent care of self (toileting, dressing, feeding) are signs of readiness for the Primary program.

To gain a better understanding of the child at 3 or 4, we also look for signs of emerging independence and sense of order. We see developing independence at work as the child becomes more comfortable in separating from you. Once they are in the classroom, we see it in their ability to choose work in the classroom. Order is seen in the child's handling of classroom materials. You may notice these changes too. Midway through a child's time in primary, we anticipate a transition into the full afternoon work cycle. This usually occurs between the ages of 4.5 and 5, when children have given up their afternoon nap.

Parents/guardians should be aware that placement and transition to a new division of the program at Steele might not precisely replicate a graded program in traditional education.

## Lower Elementary

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The transition from Primary to Lower Elementary marks the end of the First Plane of Development. The most important factor in assessing readiness for Elementary is social and emotional development. A strong sense of self-direction and independence as well as the ability to work with concentration, either alone or in a group, are essential to success in the Elementary environment. Fluent reading and writing are also necessary to flourish at the Elementary level.

## Upper Elementary

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The transition to Upper Elementary takes place when a student enters the second half of the Second Plane of Development. This usually occurs at around nine years of age. Some children benefit from spending an additional year in the Lower Elementary. Decisions regarding transition are made jointly by Lower and Upper Elementary faculty, the Principal, and in consultation with parents.

## Work, Lessons, and Self-Directed Learning

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Student activity in a Montessori classroom is hands-on, purposeful, and joyful. Because children exert a great deal of effort, often choosing to repeat and explore for long periods of time, we call this activity "work." Work, in a Montessori environment, is a lot like play – in that it is child-directed and fun. Work is also effortful, challenging, and necessary for learning. Your children will talk about their work when they tell you about school. And you should feel free to ask about their work, as in "What did you work on today?" or "What work was really fun today?"

## Primary

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**Lessons:** Children begin their experience of the Montessori classroom with a lesson. Every material, every activity, and nearly every practical or social interaction has a planned or spontaneous lesson associated with it—often more than one. There are lessons in how to use the Montessori materials, how to have snack, how to walk around someone's rug, how to do long division with the golden beads, and more. The teacher takes careful note of each child's development in all areas in order to present exactly the right lesson at the perfect moment. The actual lesson consists of carefully analyzed, gracefully executed

movements showing the essence of the activity being presented. Once your child has had a lesson on a piece of material, he or she is free to take it from the shelf whenever it is available, and to work with it as long as it holds his or her engagement and focus.

At the beginning, new children have not had many lessons, and their choices are limited. They may spend a lot of time observing or learning the basic elements of classroom behavior, such as using quiet voices, controlling movement, having snack, using the bathroom, and respecting the work of other children. Soon enough, they will have lessons and choices of their own.

**Work:** When children are not in a lesson, gathered in a group, eating, or outside, they spend their day choosing material from the shelves and working with it to their own satisfaction. Montessori uses the term “work” for all school activity through which a child develops their skills, knowledge, and independence.

**Work on paper:** Much of the work in the Primary is a physical and mental activity which does not create a physical product, such as a piece of paper. However, concrete work will occasionally be sent home in your child’s family folder. Your child will also have an opportunity to share work with you at *Watch Me Work* events.

**Understanding your child’s work:** Sometimes a piece of work can be difficult to interpret, and often the process has been more important to the child than the final product. You can start a productive conversation by making factual observations and asking questions, such as: “I see you did some work with numbers,” “You used a lot of blue!” or, “What can you tell me about this?” These kinds of remarks support your child’s independence and personal growth more effectively than corrections or judgments. Even positive judgments, such as “Good job!” or “What a beautiful picture!” can adversely affect the independence of your child.

Remember that your most important reaction to your child’s work can be the special time you devote to sharing it with him. Your gift of time and undivided attention will be most satisfying to your child. If you have questions or concerns about your child’s work, please contact the teacher.

## Elementary

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**Lessons:** Lessons continue in the Elementary classroom, with a new form appropriate for the older child. The stories of the universe, the formation of the earth, the coming of life and of humans, and the achievements of numbers and writing are the subjects of five Great Lessons that are presented every year in the fall. Numerous related lessons, some in story form, some with materials, and some as demonstrations and experiments, proceed from these key lessons, and children choose follow-up work from a limitless range of possibilities.

**Work:** The work in the Elementary class responds to the needs and characteristics of older children. Children will often work in groups on long, involved research projects that may take them beyond the classroom on Going Outs into the community. Again, the best way to find out more about your child’s work is to ask questions and make observations. Your child will also have the opportunity to share work with you during the *Watch Me Work* events.

**Work on paper:** In the Elementary, work continues to be a physical and mental process, but concrete products also become more common. When students transition into our upper elementary classroom, more attention is paid to goal setting, deadlines and time management skills. As always, discussions with your child, classroom observations, Parent Teacher conferences and *Watch Me Work* events are wonderful ways to become familiar with the type of work your child is doing.



## Computers and Video

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**Classroom Use:** The Montessori classroom engages the child using concrete materials that are designed to be handled directly. Direct engagement within the environment is an essential part of brain development. For these reasons, computers and video presentations are not used often in the Primary classrooms. Video presentations are occasionally used in the Elementary classrooms to supplement an area of study. Students in Lower and Upper Elementary make moderate use of computers, learning and using research and document production skills.

**At Home:** Recent studies in learning and development have shown a marked decrease in several factors that contribute to learning, including attention span, comprehension, and initiating tasks in young children exposed to television. **We request that children arrive in the morning having had no television, video game, or computer activity before school.** Video games are not permitted at school at any time.

## Sharing

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Children enjoy sharing their personal treasures and experiences with classmates, and sharing constitutes an essential element of social development in a Montessori classroom. Your child's teacher will arrange an appropriate time and setting to support a constructive experience. Sharing will not happen every day, and time may not allow for every item to be shared, so it can be helpful to prepare your child to exercise some patience and accommodation around the event.

If your child would like to share an object or an experience at school, you can help make the experience more satisfying by talking it through with him or her beforehand, helping to bring out the interesting information and considering what he or she might want to say. If an object requires special handling or should be 'just for looking,' it's a good idea to establish this with your child and the teacher in advance.

We ask that parents help their children exercise tasteful choices in what they bring to school.

Appropriate items include:

- natural specimens (rocks, shells, flowers, nests, etc.)
- interesting books, especially those depicting a real-life situation—just one at a time, please
- objects from other cultures
- items the child has made
- photographs of particular significance to the child
- items which relate to an important story the child can tell from personal life experience

Toys, live animals, and items inappropriate for children should stay at home. **Check with your child's teacher if you are unsure of the appropriateness of an item or the best time to bring it.**

## Field Trips and 'Going Out'

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### Primary

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The Primary classrooms do not normally go on outings or field trips. Short walks in the neighborhood are plenty of challenge and excursion for these younger children.

### Elementary

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**Going Out:** In the Elementary program, children are encouraged to look beyond the classroom for resources and answers to their questions. The classroom is purposefully limited to encourage going outside of the classroom. Children may visit the library, a museum, or a local business for additional research

materials, or to participate in purchasing supplies from a local shop. These trips, or ‘Going Outs,’ serve as an introduction to the community beyond the classroom and help children develop independence and social skills.

Information prepared by the students, including time, date, and details of the trip and transportation, as well as permission slips, will be sent home ahead of time. Managing permission slips is an essential part of developing independence, so children without signed slips will not be able to call for permission on the day of the outing, and will join another classroom at school for the day. If you do not wish to give permission to send your child on a class trip, please contact the school well in advance so we can make alternative arrangements.

## COMMUNITY, RESPECT, AND DISCIPLINE

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### General Expectations

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Steele Montessori is a peaceful community of families, students, and teachers. As adults in the community, we aspire at all times to model grace, courtesy, and a deep respect for our community. These values are visible in small and large ways: from cheerful morning greetings and handshakes to the care with which physical spaces are maintained to the manner in which older students assume responsibility for themselves and leadership for their younger peers.

Within this frame, discipline is highly valued as the skill of self-regulation. Maria Montessori distinguished between the “spontaneous discipline” typical of happily engaged children and adult-centered strategies for maintaining “control.” The ability to master oneself is a foundational skill for all subsequent learning. While this is a central goal of all our programs, it is in the primary program where developing the capacity to attain and sustain deep concentration is a focus.

Adults set limits through example. We try always to direct with positive rather than negative guidance. At no time may physical punishment such as spanking a child take place on school grounds. At all times patience, restraint, and respect for the child’s needs for sensitive intervention govern adult interaction with children.

### Strategies for supporting self-regulation and discipline

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Of course, children, like all of us, don’t always live up to these expectations. Our ultimate goal is to help children develop independence and self-discipline in all areas, and in our work towards that goal we use age-appropriate strategies to guide their behavior.

When students have difficulty with their responsibilities, a series of actions may be taken depending on the significance of an inappropriate behavior. Each student incident is treated individually, but the following staff responses may occur:

### Less Serious

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- Student redirected by teacher
- Problem discussed with student
- Other ways of handling a situation brainstormed
- Short peace area time within the classroom

- Assigned seating near the teacher for a period of time
- Work contracts
- Logical consequences
- Writing or saying an apology
- Restoring the environment
- Parent/guardian note or phone call

### More Serious

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- Removal from the classroom for a period of time
- Outside assistance from school personnel (such as the Behavior Specialist)
- Family conference
- Development of an action plan for student, parents/guardians, and teacher

### Unacceptable Behaviors

Experimental behavior is a predictable feature of all developmental levels, and we strive to regard such behaviors as indicative of a child's needs. However, because the community lies at the center of our approach to learning, any individual action that negatively affects the welfare of the community is considered unacceptable. As a result, Steele cannot allow the following:

- Language that expresses disrespect for another person
- Violent behavior, e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, throwing objects at a person
- Vandalism
- Inappropriate touching

### Resolution Process for Unacceptable Behavior

The first instance of unacceptable behavior will be addressed by the witnessing staff member. The staff member will first stop the behavior. Then, depending on the child's age, they will discuss with the child privately why the behavior is inappropriate and suggest strategies for preventing its recurrence. Parents/guardians will be notified of both the behavior and its resolution.

The second occurrence will be addressed by the witnessing adult and an administrator and will result in the development of an action plan during a Child Study meeting. All action plans are developed in consultation with the family and include concrete goals for resolving negative behavior.

Though we are confident that well-articulated and faithfully implemented action plans will enable the child to address difficulties, in rare instances efforts to correct the behavior fail. In those instances appropriate disciplinary action up to and including suspension or expulsion will be considered.

### Bullying

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Steele Montessori Academy follows SAISD policy on bullying. Bullying is defined as repeated and systematic harassment and attacks on others, perpetrated by individuals or groups. Bullying takes many forms and can include many different behaviors, such as, but not limited to:

- Physical violence and attacks
- Verbal taunts, name calling and put downs including ethnically-based verbal abuse and gender-based put downs
- Threats and intimidations
- Extortion or stealing of money and possessions
- Exclusion from the peer group

A student who engages in any act of bullying is subject to appropriate disciplinary action including suspension, expulsion or referral to law enforcement officials. If you believe your child is being bullied you should contact the school principal or social worker.

## Suspensions

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Steele Montessori Academy follows SAISD policy on suspensions.

## Students with Disabilities and Manifestation Determination Meetings

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Steele Montessori Academy will hold a Manifestation Determination Meeting any time a student is being removed from his or her placement for more than ten (10) school days in one school year.

During this review, a representative of SAISD, the holder of the student's educational rights, the IEP team, and a staff member who can adequately define the student's disability will be present. All parties will review all relevant information in the student's file and all relevant details of the behavior.

The Manifestation Determination team will discuss the link between the student's behavior and disability. If the team finds that there is no direct link between the student's behavior and disability, and the IEP was being implemented with fidelity leading up to and during the behavioral infraction, the infraction is then considered **not** a manifestation of the student's disability, and Steele can move forward with processing the suspension, ensuring the student receives access to adequate educational supports during the suspension. If the team finds that there is a direct link between the behavior and the disability, or the IEP was not being implemented with fidelity leading up to or during the behavior, the behavioral infraction is considered a manifestation of the student's disability, and the student will return to his or her current educational placement. Steele Montessori Academy will schedule an IEP review meeting to update the student's IEP to accurately reflect the student's current level of functioning within 30 days.

## Due Process and Appeals Procedure for Parents/Guardians

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Due process will be followed for all disciplinary actions. Before imposing a short-term suspension, the Principal shall immediately notify the parents/guardians in writing that the student may be suspended from school. This notice will be in their dominant language and will provide a description of the incident(s) for which suspension is proposed. It will inform the parents/guardians of their right to request an immediate informal conference with the Principal. The parents/guardians of the student and the student shall have the opportunity to present the student's version of the incident and to ask questions of the complaining witnesses indirectly through the teacher or the Principal. The Principal's decision to impose a short-term suspension may be challenged by the parents/guardians.

Before any expulsion, the Principal will consult the SAISD leadership and immediately notify the student's parents/guardians in writing, in their dominant language. Long-term suspensions or expulsions will only be imposed after the student has been found guilty at a formal hearing. The hearing shall include the Principal, staff members involved with the incident, and the student with his/her parents/guardians. The student shall have the right to be represented by counsel, question witnesses, and present evidence.

## Health and Safety

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## Emergency Records

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It is mandatory that all health forms be kept current. If you take your child to the doctor during the school year, please update immunization record as needed. If your child's health form is not kept current, your child may be denied admission until updated. All health forms must be on file before your child begins school.

Please keep the school informed of any changes in your child's enrollment forms. The school must have accurate phone numbers for home, work, and emergency contacts.

Please note that the safeguard of all student information (health, academic, and otherwise) aligns with FERPA.

## Illness

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Please inform the office that your child will not be attending due to illness.

For many communicable illnesses, we ask that students wait to return to school until they have been clear of symptoms for 24 hours and/or have undergone treatment for 24 hours. We may also ask for a note from either a parent/guardian or a licensed practitioner. Further information for specific communicable illnesses is provided below:

1. **COVID related systems:** Any student who shows signs of fever, runny nose, sore throat, coughing, fatigue, or headache will be asked to be picked up. Students will immediately be removed from their peers in our Wellness Room while they wait to be picked up. Student may return to school once ONE of the following happens:
  - a. Student obtains a negative COVID result taken after 4 days of the onset of symptoms.
  - b. Student obtains a different diagnosis from the doctor and gives a note to our nurse AND has gone 72 hours without a fever.
  - c. Student quarantines for 14 days.
2. Please note that any student found to have close contact with a student that has been diagnosed with COVID will have to quarantine for 12-14 days regardless of a negative test result.
3. Conjunctivitis ("pink eye"): If diagnosed with a viral infection, a student may return to school after any redness and discharge have disappeared. If diagnosed with a bacterial infection, a student may return to school 24 hours after commencing antibiotic treatment if a licensed practitioner provides a note attesting to the diagnosis, the onset of treatment, and that the child is cleared to return to school.
4. Fever, vomiting, and diarrhea: A child may return to school after he/she has been free of all symptoms of illness for 24 hours.
5. Pediculosis (infestation by live head lice): A student may remain in class that day; however, parents or guardians should commence treatment at the conclusion of the school day. A child may return to school upon submitting a parent or guardian note attesting to the fact that he/she is undergoing treatment. A student with only nits (eggs) shall not be excluded from school, however, we will notify the parents or guardians and advise them to monitor for re-infestation.
6. Ringworm: A student may return to school upon submitting a licensed practitioner's note stating that the student is under treatment.

7. Strep throat: A student may return to school 24 hours after beginning antibiotic treatment, provided they are without fever and have a note from a licensed practitioner affirming the start of treatment.

We will inform the school community if we are aware of cases of the following communicable illnesses: hand-foot-and-mouth disease, strep throat, pink eye, and lice. We will inform the school of other health issues as needed.

In case of an absence due to a contagious disease or an illness of more than five days duration, a note from your child's physician is required before your child can be readmitted to the classroom.

If your child develops a fever while at school or shows other signs of illness, you will be contacted and requested to take them home within an hour. If you cannot be reached, an emergency contact will be called to take your child home.

Please remember that children go outside daily except in inclement weather. If your child is unable to take part in outdoor activities because of illness, please keep them at home for the day since we cannot keep individual children indoors during these activities.

## Medication

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**All medication must be given directly to the school office for proper storage: no medication may be left in lunchboxes or backpacks.** If your child arrives before 8:00 am please give medication and forms to the senior staff member present. A member of the administration who is trained to administer medication will administer prescription OR non-prescription medication to a child only if the following criteria are met:

1. An Authorization for Medication Administration form is signed by the parent/guardian with the name and dosage of the medication, steps of administration, and dates and/or times/conditions for administration clearly written on the form (forms can be found in the school office).
2. Prescription medication is clearly labeled by the pharmacy or physician, in the original container, and specifically for your child.
3. Non-prescription medication will only be administered from its original container. If more than one dose is to be administered, a licensed health practitioner must approve the administration and dosage on the medication order form or a physician's prescription slip.

## Food, Nutrition, and Community

We place a great deal of emphasis on all aspects of meal preparation and consumption at Steele. Primary children prepare snack, set and clear the meal tables. Community is built around meals, and part of the work of being a family is preparing food. From shopping, cooking, and setting the table to eating and cleaning up, families reconnect at the dinner table. Children want and need to be included in the planning, the preparation, and the cleaning up of meals.

### *Breakfast*

A free and nutritious breakfast is offered to everyone during the morning work period.

### *Lunch*

Lunch is an important part of the children's workday. This meal provides an opportunity to socialize and renew energy while practicing grace and courtesy with the other children and staff.

Steele offers free standard lunches each day for all students. The lunch menu will be located on the school website. Certain medical dietary restrictions can be accommodated. You will need to feel out a dietary restriction form from our school nurse, Ms. Jamie. Without this form, your child will continue to be served a standard lunch.

If you choose to send lunch with your child, please note that some classes are a nut-free environment due to other student's allergies. We ask that you check with your child's teacher before sending items containing nuts, including peanut butter. Sandwiches, cheese and crackers, and rolled lunch meat (even cold pizza) are healthy alternatives. Milk and water will be provided, so please do not send other drinks. We will return the uneaten portion of your child's lunch so that you know what they have consumed and can make appropriate adjustments. Please do not bring or send fast food/carry-out lunches for your child.

#### *Home Guidelines*

Involve your children in preparing their own lunch. Your child can slice cheese and put crackers into a container, choose and wash vegetables and fruit, and even help make a sandwich.

Prepare the kitchen/dining room so your child can participate. Your child will want to pour their own milk or water, help with peeling vegetables, set and clear the table. You can make that process safe and fun by providing the proper equipment: a small glass pitcher, safe vegetable peelers, apple corers, egg cutters, scrub brushes, and child-sized mops and brooms.

Establish a daily routine. As much as possible, have breakfast, snack, and dinner at the same time each day. This will allow your child to anticipate and participate in the rhythm of the household. Each afternoon, let your child get ready for the next day by emptying and cleaning the lunchbox (please wipe out lunch boxes daily). Upon returning from school, have a small pitcher of milk or water available on a low shelf in the refrigerator so that your child may prepare their own snack.

#### *Snacks*

Students are allowed to have a snack during the day that they help to prepare for themselves. We try to keep these snacks nutritious and students often help prepare for snack in the classroom. If you are interested in providing snack, please contact Linda Galvan.

#### *Celebration Food*

We seek always to promote health and well-being. Please do not send in sweet snacks or junk food (cookies, cupcakes, etc.) for birthdays or other holiday celebrations. **All food items must be store-bought and not homemade.** Please inform your child's teacher of any upcoming events and plan a contribution that will be enjoyable and appropriate for all. Please respect allergies when providing food for celebration. In some cases, they are a matter of life and death.

#### *Food Allergies*

Parents/guardians are responsible for providing all food, including lunch and snack, for their child in the case of food allergies. Please consult with your child's teacher to plan special foods on birthdays and holidays.

### **Bathroom Independence**

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Steele requires families to work with their children toward bathroom independence before the first day of school. The Montessori primary classroom is focused on helping children achieve independence, and we support children who are still working towards bathroom independence. We ask all families to provide the school with one complete change of clothing (including underwear) for their child. For children who are working towards bathroom independence, we ask that families leave multiple changes of underwear and pants. Please note that Steele Montessori will not change pull-ups or diapers (unless doing so is medically necessary). When a child has an accident, either the nurse or the assistant helps the student change (always with a focus on enabling them to do it themselves).

## Car Seat Safety

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Steele follows all applicable laws and safety guidelines for child safety seats. Please ensure that your child is in a safety seat upon arrival and departure from school. Texas law requires children under 8 years of age be properly seated in an installed infant, convertible (toddler) or booster child seat, according to the manufacturer's instructions. Booster seats must be used with both lap and shoulder belts. Texas continues to require that all passengers regardless of age wear their seat belts. There are significant penalties and fines for violations. Additional information is available in the school office. Due to the safety of children in safety seats, our staff cannot buckle students in. We ask that you teach your child how to buckle themselves properly in order to come through our carpool line.

## Security

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The front door to the school is locked at all times. In order to enter the school, visitors must be buzzed in by the office. If your child arrives after 8:15 am, you must sign in with the front office so we can take your child off the "absent" list.

As stated in the Arrival/Dismissal section, Steele is authorized to release a child only to those people permitted to pick up your child as indicated on the emergency card.

## Emergency Preparedness

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SAISD has made extensive preparations for a wide range of emergencies, including on-site emergencies, local emergencies, and alerts issued by the National Homeland Security Office.

Here are some guidelines to follow in the event of a crisis or emergency:

- A notice of procedures will be posted on the school's website (and emailed if possible). Follow instructions carefully.
- If feasible, you will be contacted directly by telephone. Remain calm and follow instructions.
- In some emergencies (a fire, for example) the children may be walked to a safe location where you can pick them up. This will be posted on the website, and an attempt will be made to call you.
- If we are required to "shelter in place" at the school, we have provisions and are completely prepared to do so.
- In some cases, SAISD may instruct Steele to leave the building or location, or we may be told to allow no one to enter our building. These are stressful situations. Please know that your child's well-being and safety are our top priority and that they will be carefully supervised until you can be reunited.
- It is critical that you keep all records up to date in our office—including cell phone numbers, email, and names of those individuals you allow to pick up your child. Consider carefully your list of those to whom we can release your child in a crisis/emergency. Please email any changes to [rthomas@saisd.net](mailto:rthomas@saisd.net).
- Respond immediately to any requests for items or information related to our emergency plan.
- Keep the school's telephone number and website handy at home, work, and in your car.

Steele follows the Emergency Preparedness guidelines outlined on the SAISD website <https://saisd.net>.



