

Breakthrough Montessori PCS

Student/Family Policies

July 3, 2019

Source: Breakthrough Montessori Family Handbook 2019-20

Discipline

Breakthrough 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.

At Breakthrough, 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.

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. At all times patience, restraint, and respect for the child’s needs for sensitive intervention govern adult interaction with children.

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

- Student redirected by teacher
- Assigned seating near the teacher for a period of time
- Teacher temporarily adjusts the degree of independence the child exercises in the classroom
- Problem discussed with student
- Other ways of handling a situation brainstormed
- Parent/guardian note or phone call

More Serious

- Removal from the classroom for a period of time
- Outside assistance from school personnel (such as the Director of Curriculum and Instruction)
- Meeting with parent/guardians
- Development of an action plan for student, parents/guardians, and teacher
- Referral to the Child Study process

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. Different behavior is also typical of different age groups. Students who have limited expressive language tend to use their hands more to express themselves, whereas hitting or kicking in a child that has full command of language is a more serious behavior. Safety is our first priority, and all actions we take are to ensure the safety of our students. Furthermore, 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, Breakthrough cannot allow the following:

- Language that expresses disrespect for another person
- Violent behavior, e.g., hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, throwing objects at a person
- Causing, attempting or threatening bodily injury or emotional distress
 - "Bodily injury" means a cut, abrasion, bruise, burn or disfigurement; physical pain; illness; impairment of the function of a bodily member, organ, or mental faculty; or any other injury to the body, no matter how temporary.
 - "Emotional distress" means mental suffering or distress that requires more than trivial treatment or counseling.
- Vandalism
- Inappropriate touching

Resolution Process for Unacceptable Behavior

Primary Level

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.

If the behavior is repeated, escalates, or targets a specific child or group of children, it will be addressed by the witnessing adult and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Student Support, or the Montessori Support Specialist. Depending on the age of the student and the seriousness of the behavior, this will result in the development of an action plan. All action plans are developed in consultation with the family and include concrete goals for resolving negative behavior.

Elementary Level

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 the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Student Support, or the Montessori Support Specialist, and, depending on the age of the child and the seriousness of the behavior, will result in the development of an action plan. 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. Out of school suspension/expulsion is only permitted to ensure safety and in response to the most serious offenses, such as serious acts of violence or possession of a firearm. In the unlikely event that a child is suspended, the school will work with the family to ensure that the student continues his/her studies and receives all assignments during the suspension; can communicate with school staff about the assignments; and has the opportunity to make up any work missed during the suspension if he/she cannot complete it during the suspension. As per DC regulations, Breakthrough will not suspend any student for more than five consecutive school days or more than 20 cumulative school days in the year.

All disciplinary action taken at Breakthrough must be individualized, fair, equitable, developmentally appropriate, proportional to the severity of the behavior, and restorative.

Due Process and Appeals Procedure for Parents/Guardians

Due process will be followed for all disciplinary actions. Before imposing a short-term suspension, the Executive Director 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 Director of Curriculum and Instruction and the Executive Director. 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 Director of Curriculum and Instruction. The decision to impose a short-term suspension may be challenged by the parents/guardians. The Board of Trustees serves as the final appeal for families dissatisfied with a school-level decision.

Before any expulsion, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction will consult with Executive Director and the Board of Trustees 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 Executive Director, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, 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.

Students with Disabilities and Manifestation Determination Meetings

Students with disabilities have the same rights and responsibilities as other students, and may be disciplined for the same behavior listed above. A multidisciplinary team will hold a manifestation meeting to determine if the incident was a manifestation of their disability.

Attendance

According to the Public Charter School Board and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), a student who is absent for one day without a valid excuse is considered truant. A student who is absent from school without a valid excuse for 10 or more days within a single school year is considered a chronic truant.

Breakthrough Montessori upholds the following Attendance Policy:

Absences

1. Students must be in school for 80% of the school day (defined as 6 hours between 8:30 am and 3:30 pm) in order to be considered “present.”
2. An excused absence requires parental approval and proper notification. Excused absences include:
 - a. Illness (a doctor’s note is required if the student is absent for more than five days)
 - b. Doctor or dentist appointment
 - c. Death in the family
 - d. Observation of a religious holiday
 - e. Court appearance, including the necessity for a student to attend judiciary or administrative proceedings as a party to the action or under subpoena;
 - f. Visiting a parent/guardian who is in the military immediately before, after, or during deployment
 - g. Exclusion, by direction of DC authorities, due to quarantine, contagious disease, infection, infestation, or other condition requiring separation from other students for medical or health reasons;
 - h. If the child’s only legal parent or guardian is travelling due to circumstances covered under FMLA law;
 - i. Lawful suspension or exclusion from school by school authorities;
 - j. Temporary closing of facilities or suspension of classes due to severe weather, official activities, holidays, malfunctioning equipment, unsafe or unsanitary conditions, or other condition(s) or emergency requiring a school closing or suspension of classes;
 - k. Failure of DC to provide transportation in cases where there is a legal responsibility for the transportation of the student;
 - l. An emergency or other circumstance approved by Breakthrough Montessori.
3. Unexcused absences include:
 - a. Family vacations
 - b. Oversleeping
 - c. Errands
 - d. Social events
 - e. Hosting visitors
 - f. Visiting relatives
 - g. Commute/traffic
4. Proper documentation includes parent notes, doctor’s notes, or court documents.
5. Breakthrough Montessori reports all absences as unexcused unless the school receives proper documentation.

6. Parents/guardians of students with 5 or more unexcused absences in one advisory period will be requested to participate in a conference with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction. Please note that the school year is divided into 4 advisory periods.
7. Per the Attendance Accountability Amendment Act of 2013, Breakthrough must notify OSSE within two business days of a student's 10th unexcused absence. OSSE will provide the parent with a truancy prevention resource guide.
8. Students ages 5-13 years old with 10 or more unexcused absences will also be referred to Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) for suspected educational neglect.
9. Please note that a parent or guardian may write an excuse for up to ten excused absences, given they adhere to the reasons listed above in point 2. After ten, there are only some acceptable reasons, with documentation, for an absence to be considered excused. Otherwise, all subsequent absences will be considered unexcused. Please see chart below.

<i>Excused Absence Reason *</i>	<i>Absences 1 through 10** : Documentation required within 5 days for the absence to be considered excused</i>	<i>Absence 11 and beyond: Documentation required within 5 days for the absence to be considered excused</i>
Student Illness	Parent or guardian note. Doctor's note required if student is absent for 5 or more consecutive days.	Note from the student's doctor or other medical professional
Exclusion, by direction of DC authorities, due to quarantine or illness	Parent or guardian note	Official documentation of the exclusion
Doctor or dentist appointment	Parent or guardian note	Note from dentist or doctor
Death in the family	Parent or guardian note	Parent or guardian note
Observance of a religious holiday	Parent or guardian note	Parent or guardian note naming the holiday to be observed.
Court appearance	Parent or guardian note	Copy of the subpoena or other official documentation of the court appearance.
Lack of district-provided transportation when there is a legal responsibility for the district to provide transportation	No documentation needed	No documentation needed
Visiting a family member before, during, or after deployment	Parent or guardian note	Official documentation of the deployment dates.

** Any absence for which sufficient documentation is not provided will be considered unexcused.*

*** The number of days absent includes both excused and unexcused absences. Three unexcused tardies equals an excused absence, and will be included in the count.*

Late arrival

1. For the 2019-20 school year, students are marked tardy if they arrive at 8:35 AM or later (school begins at 8:30 AM).
2. Breakthrough reports all tardies as unexcused unless the school receives proper documentation for valid late arrivals.
3. Three unexcused tardies are equivalent to an unexcused absence.

Resolving Complaints

We encourage family members to contact their child's teacher directly with any questions or concerns about their child's classroom experience. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction also provides a valuable resource to families that seek additional clarification about their child's educational journey. If the family and the Director of Curriculum and Instruction need further assistance in resolving an issue, please contact the Executive Director. If the family and the school-based leadership do not reach a satisfactory solution, the family may contact the Chair of the Breakthrough Board of Trustees by writing to board@breakthroughmontessori.org.

Nondiscrimination Policy

In accordance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the D.C. Human Rights Act of 1977, as amended, District of Columbia Official Code Section 2- 1401.01 et seq. (Act), Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School does not discriminate (including employment therein and admission thereto) on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family status, family responsibilities, matriculation, political affiliation, genetic information, disability, source of income, status as a victim of an interfamily offense, or place of residence or business. Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, which is prohibited by the Act. In addition, harassment based on any of the above-protected categories is prohibited. Discrimination in violation of the aforementioned laws will not be tolerated. Violators will be subject to disciplinary action.

Notification of Rights Under FERPA

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords parents and students over 18 years of age ("eligible students") certain rights with respect to the student's education records. These rights are:

1. The right to inspect and review the student's education records within 45 days of the day the School received a request for access. Parents of eligible students should submit to the School principal (or appropriate school official) a written request that identified the record (s) they wish to inspect. The School official will make arrangements for access and notify the parent or eligible student of the time and place where the records may be inspected.
2. The right to request the amendment of the student's education records that the parent of

eligible student believes are inaccurate. Parents or eligible students may ask the School to amend a record that they believe is inaccurate. They should write the School principal (or appropriate school official), clearly identify the part of the record they want changed, and specify why it is inaccurate. If the School decides not to amend the record as requested by the parent or eligible student, the School will notify the parent or eligible student of the decision and advise them of their right to a hearing regarding the request for amendment. Additional information regarding the hearing procedures will be provided to the parent of eligible student when notified of the right to a hearing.

3. The right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in the student's education records, except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosure without consent.

One exception, which permits disclosure without consent, is disclosure to school officials with legitimate educational interests. A school official is a person employed by the School as an administrator, supervisor, instructor, or support staff member (including health or medical staff and law enforcement unit personnel); a person serving on the School Board; a person or company with whom the School has contracted to perform a special task (such as an attorney, auditor, medical consultant, or therapist); or a parent or student serving on an official committee, such as a disciplinary or grievance committee, or assisting another school official in performing his or her tasks.

A school official has a legitimate educational interest if the official needs to review an education record in order to fulfill his or her professional responsibility.

The right to file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures by the School District to comply with the requirements of FERPA. The name and address of the Office that administers FERPA are:

Family Policy Compliance Office
U.S. Department of Education
4000 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-5901

Open Meeting Policy

The Breakthrough Montessori Board of Trustees meets six times per year. Two of these meetings are Open Meetings, which means members of the public (including Breakthrough staff, parents, guardians and other family members) are welcome to attend. One of these Open Meetings will be held during fall semester, while the second will be held during spring semester. Dates, times and locations of Open Meetings will be displayed on the school's calendar, as well as included in monthly calendar e-mails to families.