

Alliance Charter Elementary Handbook

The information included in this handbook is for all Alliance Charter families. Further district policy information can be found in the Neenah Joint School District Handbook. As a charter school, Alliance is an instrumentality of the Neenah Joint School District, following many of the same policies and procedures, but allowing for independent procedures as well.

This document is available online at <http://www.neenah.k12.wi.us/schools/alliance/> on the parent resource page.

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Curriculum and Methodology:

What is a Charter School?

Alliance Charter School is a free, public elementary school, serving grades K-5. It was created through a contract, or charter, with the Neenah School Board. It opened its doors to 75 students in grades K-3 in the fall of 2004 and added 4th grade classes in the fall of 2005. Fifth grade was added in the fall of 2006.

Alliance uses a Montessori philosophy and curriculum and meets the academic objectives outlined in the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards <http://dpi.wi.gov/standards> (See: for more information on those state standards).

The teachers have extensive Montessori training, and opportunities to pursue additional training as well. Alliance is an active component of the Neenah Joint School District. As a charter school, Alliance is free from many of the state regulations regarding public education, and able to provide greater educational innovation and choice in public education. The school is held accountable for student learning outcomes. **No tuition is charged.**

Alliance Charter Elementary Mission Statement:

We are a community of learners working together to provide a unique choice in public education, using an enriching Montessori environment. We strive to engage and inspire students to become life-long learners, problem solvers, and responsible global citizens.

As a “community of learners...”

- Our school, families, and community all play a role in meeting the needs of our students. Education is a shared responsibility. Learning occurs everywhere and does not end when the school day is finished.
- Our teachers and families work together and support each other to enhance the learning process. Parents, family, and community members are used as learning resources and volunteers in the school.
- We are all constantly learning and improving our own skills, in order to be effective teachers and models for our children.

Key Components of our “Montessori learning environment:”

- **Engaged Learning** – The most profound learning takes place when the learner is directly and intrinsically involved in the learning process. Providing daily opportunities for students to make decisions, use initiative, and follow their interests motivates students to learn.
- **Individualized Instruction** – Students have the ability to progress at their own rate, with instruction presented in a variety of ways, including small group, one-on-one, and when appropriate, whole group. Specialist classes may be done as a whole group with teachers differentiating instruction to meet individual student needs.
- **Multi-Age Student Groupings** – A multi-age classroom structure encourages students to teach and learn from each other.
- **Hands-on Activities and Sequential Learning Materials** – Enriched learning takes place through the senses as students actively engage in a variety of hands-on, real-life activities, with learning materials that teach specific concepts, and interaction with their peers and teachers. These meaningful experiences lead to the abstract understanding of ideas.
- **Specially Prepared Environment** –The classroom provides an inquiring, collaborative, nurturing atmosphere which encourages academic excellence, and physical, social, and emotional development.
- **Uninterrupted Blocks of Work Time** – Daily blocks of work time allow students to develop concentration and creativity, exercise choice in their work activities, investigate topics of interest, problem solve, and teach and learn from each other. Through their projects and studies, students learn the connections between various subjects as well as their practical applications.
- **Teachers as Researchers and Facilitators**– Alliance teachers are skilled observers of the students in their classrooms and know how to create optimal learning environments. Teachers serve as a guide, promoting problem solving techniques and leading children toward independence by stimulating their thinking and learning.

Philosophy and Curriculum

Alliance uses a Montessori education model, and the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards, as its base of instruction. For more information about our curriculum, please visit www.amshq.org. Students at Alliance participate in all district-wide and state mandated testing programs.

A great deal of effort and thought is devoted to the “prepared environment” of a Montessori classroom. Each piece of material has been placed on the shelf to help the child independently develop a particular skill. Children of all ages are intermingled in the Elementary program so that they might help and learn from one another. The classroom environment encourages student initiative and self-directed learning. It promotes a sense of community and the nurturing of each student’s social, intellectual and emotional growth.

Alliance classrooms take a hands-on approach to learning and foster the independence and natural desire to learn in each child. The teacher’s role in this environment is to guide children to find their own way in developing themselves as a complete person that can become an independent and responsible member of our community. Each child will be able to learn through a choice of activities indicated on their work plans. They will be expected to adhere to due dates set by the teacher. They will be challenged as is individually appropriate.

*“No one can be free unless he is independent: therefore, the first, active manifestations of the child’s individual liberty must be so guided that through this activity he may arrive at independence.” -
Maria Montessori*

Instructional Materials

Students will use a variety of educational materials in the classroom to create an enriching educational process. Many of the materials are traditional Montessori designed learning materials, others are tools chosen by our teachers to use as they feel appropriate. All materials serve a purpose and must be treated with the utmost respect. If you are unsure about the purpose of a material in your child’s classroom, please ask.

As much of our curriculum utilizes special classroom materials, if your child should bring home an unfamiliar object, please return it to school. These materials are an important part of our curriculum and are very expensive to replace. Likewise, it is asked that toys and personal items be left at home.

Homework

Much of our curriculum is hands-on, involving special classroom materials. During daily work time, students are expected to work very hard in the classroom, and additional homework is not typically necessary. However, reading practice, review of math facts, and other work may be requested at home to help build critical skills. Occasionally, students will also need to complete projects or do additional research at home. The amount and type of homework will depend upon the classroom and individual student needs. More homework can be expected in the upper grades to prepare students for middle school. Please schedule time to assist your child with these requirements.

Student Progress Reports/Report Cards

Alliance uses a student progress report that differs from that of traditional Neenah elementary schools. Our report card format strives to explain the specific student knowledge that has been achieved during each semester of the school year. Because our emphasis is on learning and building the desire to learn, the level of understanding in each academic area is recorded instead of using a traditional grading system.

Student Testing (Forward Exam)

To monitor the educational development and progress of our students, Alliance Charter uses the Forward Exam for grades 3-5 in the spring. Testing methods are helpful in monitoring individual student progress from one year to the next.

Parents’ Rights

Parents have a right to expect that the school will clearly communicate its policies (and curriculum objectives) to the parent body. The school will take concerns and input from parents seriously when establishing those policies. The school will keep parents informed about their child’s progress and his/her challenges. The school will be considerate of, and of help to, parents who need to deal with a child who is struggling with his challenges and communicate honestly with them about what they expect. Parents have the right to inspect educational records.

Students’ Rights

The following rights are fundamental to the operation of our classrooms:

- The right to be safe.
- The right to be undisturbed. (Order and self-discipline are important, and each student has the right to maintain order and concentration while involved in learning).
- The right to choose lessons that have already been presented to him/her. (Once a lesson is taught to a student it is available for choice, and the student will need to complete lessons by indicated due dates. The students’ ability to choose a lesson assures interest in the lesson).

These “rights” are not to be confused with mannerly behavior or the rules we need in order to operate our classroom effectively.

Visiting the Classroom

Safety of students and staff shall be the highest priority of our school. Access to the school is regulated and authorized by office administrators and staff during the day. Parents are encouraged to visit the school and must register at the office before going to any classroom or other area of the school building. All visitors must wear a visitor badge provided by the school.

Please contact your child’s teacher for an appropriate time to visit. This limits unanticipated distractions from the children’s lessons and work times. Please ask your child’s teacher ahead of time for some observation guidelines. They can let you know what to expect and what activities will be taking place during your visit.

Supportive Programming:

Additional Programming and Specials

- Piano Keyboarding
- Art
- Wellness Education
- Computer Lab
- Guidance
- Library
- Talent Pool – provided on a qualified, as-needed basis
- Reading Specialist – provided on a qualified, as-needed basis
- Math Specialist – provided on a qualified, as-needed basis
- Enrichment Activities – these extra activities vary from year to year

As a charter school, Alliance has the ability to offer “specials” different from those at the traditional Neenah schools. Piano keyboarding was included as a component of the Alliance curriculum because of brain and learning research done at UW-Oshkosh and elsewhere, showing the specific benefits of piano keyboarding on math skills and reasoning. Founders also chose to include this at Alliance, based on their research of similar programs at other schools. When appropriate, general and vocal music instruction are incorporated into the keyboarding classes. We believe there are many significant benefits to music education.

Our other specials also offer much benefit in the development and use of creativity, large and small motor skills, technology, teamwork and cooperation, healthy living, and more. In addition, Montessori education places a great deal of emphasis on world culture. To partner with that component of our curriculum, foreign language materials are available in the classrooms for students to use as they choose. And, parents, relatives, and community members are encouraged to share their unique cultural backgrounds and customs with students. We hope to encourage an appreciation for the many cultures and languages of our world.

NJSD Instrumental Music Program

As part of the Neenah Joint School District (NJSD), Alliance students are eligible to participate in the Instrumental Program offered by the district. At this time, two choices are available for students in the elementary school grades.

Suzuki Strings offers students in second, third, fourth, and fifth grade the opportunity to study a string instrument through the Suzuki method. Students apply for this program in the spring of their second or third grade year.

The traditional strings and band program offers fifth grade students the opportunity to learn an orchestra or band instrument using the traditional sight reading method. Students should register for this program during the spring of their fourth grade year.

Computers and Technology

Alliance students spend time each month in the school computer lab, similar to other Neenah elementary students. As appropriate, Alliance students will also have access to laptops and other computers in the classroom on a teacher-appropriated basis.

It is our belief that students should be exposed to some of the available technology of our changing world in a way that incorporates classroom lessons and real-life skills. Technology resources are researched and implemented on an ongoing basis.

Acceptable Computer Use Consent and Waiver Form

You must complete an acceptable use policy form provided by the district.

After School Activities

Parent led activities are always welcomed at Alliance, provided they first meet with the approval of the administration. Activities at the YMCA have occasionally been scheduled for Friday afternoon times, at the request of parents and the ACEC Board.

Current school sponsored extra-curricular activities include Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, Suzuki and traditional strings classes, and band. Other activities may also be offered.

Parent and Community Involvement:

Alliance Community Involvement

At Alliance Charter Elementary, education is seen as a shared responsibility among students, teachers, parents, and the community. The school is unique in its opportunities for parental involvement in the daily activities of the classroom and school operation.

Alliance seeks out community members who can share stories or enrich our classrooms in other ways. It is our goal to help our students experience some of the richness of their world and learn about the many different people in it. It is also important that we teach our students the value of helping others, and their role and responsibility in our global environment. To that end, students assist with fundraising to help with local and worldwide needs.

Some of the activities that Alliance has been involved with include celebrating International Peace Day, Community Readers, participating in the Doty Island Clean-up, fundraising for Heifer International, collecting coats for Coats for Kids, collecting holiday donations for the needy through the Giving Tree, and other food drives/fundraisers as well.

Alliance Parent Involvement

Volunteerism at Alliance Charter Elementary is extremely important. Many of the programs we offer cannot exist or cannot be successful without our wonderful volunteers. It is our goal to achieve 100% volunteer participation by our families. Our primary volunteer opportunities are listed here:

- Assist in the classroom
- Set up and take down of piano keyboards
- Assist with keyboarding, computer lab, or art classes
- Volunteer to be a field trip chaperone
- Assist in making materials at home
- Assist with fundraising and special events
- Attend ACEC meetings
- Participate on committees of the ACEC Board

Please be sure to sign the volunteer log in the office whenever you give your time. This helps us keep track of the volunteer hours spent at Alliance.

Alliance Classroom Volunteers

Mandatory background check forms and training will be given to all classroom volunteers at the beginning of the school year. Teachers will be able to supplement that training, allowing time for observation of their classroom before you officially get started working with the children.

Consistency of in-class volunteers is very important. If you plan to be helping in the classroom, (and we hope you will!) you will be asked to please set up a schedule with the teacher based on your availability and the classroom/teacher needs. Students will recognize you as a consistent part of their week, and will expect to see you at your regular time. Please try to stick to the schedule you and your teacher create, and if you will not be at school as expected, please let your teacher know.

Confidentiality

As a volunteer, you should consider yourself a “de facto” employee of the school. Please conduct yourself like any member of the teaching staff, and respect and maintain the confidentiality of our children and teachers.

Additional NJSD Parent Resource Groups

The NJSD is fortunate to have many active and involved parents. Various parent groups are available and all parents are welcome and encouraged to take part in them.

- ABC: Academic Booster Club – This organization strives to assist the district with academic enrichment programs and ideas.
- Neenah Music Parents – Parents in this organization work to ensure the success of the various music programs offered by the district.

Neenah Joint School Board Information

The Neenah Joint School Board (NJSB) meets on the first and third Tuesday of each month, at 6:00 PM, at the Administration Building. The building is located at 410 South Commercial Street. Minutes and agendas are available online at www.neenah.k12.wi.us. Meetings are open to the public, and always begin with an open forum. Contact information for the Superintendent and school board members is online as well.

School Leadership:

Governing Boards and Organizations

Alliance Charter Elementary was founded by a group of parents and educators. As a charter school, we are held accountable for our results in education, however, we have more flexibility than traditional public schools in the way we choose to educate our children. We are fortunate to have two governing boards to help maintain our unique culture and to support our school. These groups consist primarily of parents working hand in hand with our teachers to provide input to the Neenah Joint School District in the management of our school's operations, programs, and support services.

ACEC Board

Alliance Charter Education Corporation (ACEC) is a non-profit corporation originally formed by parents to work with the Neenah Joint School District to open Alliance.

The ACEC Board consists of 12 members nominated and elected by parents, classroom teachers, and the Alliance principal. Length of term will vary for different positions. These positions include a Chairperson, Chair-Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, Education Coordinator, and Parent Representatives. The principal and Alliance teachers compose the remaining members of the board.

The board's current role centers on upholding the school's charter, mission, and philosophy. It supports the school by providing volunteers as needed, planning activities to support the school's curriculum, and managing fundraisers. The Council also works with the Roosevelt PTO to provide enrichment activities. Among other areas, ACEC members work on achieving grants and fundraising,

Comments/Concerns/Suggestions

Concerns over school/classroom activities should always be directed to your child's teacher first and then to the school principal, if necessary. If you have other concerns or suggestions, please feel free to direct them to the Alliance Advisory Council or an ACEC member. A suggestion/comment box will be available outside the office, near the Alliance bulletin board.

Fundraisers

Various fundraisers take place throughout the year, in an effort to fund our school enrichment programs. Field trips, guest speakers and programs, materials and supplies for the classrooms, teacher training, computer programs, new technology, and more are all funded independent of the Neenah Joint School District. Because Alliance is responsible for funding these needs, and because we consider them an important part of our educational program, successful fundraising is critical to our success. We ask that you support our fundraising efforts and get involved as you are able. Some families prefer to make a simple monetary donation instead, and we understand and welcome those gifts. We are always looking for grants for the school as well, and welcome any ideas or help with those grant writing tasks.

School Activities/Events

A variety of special programs and events take place throughout the year, helping to enrich the education of our students, to unite members of our Alliance family, to recognize and reward our students, staff members, and parents, to showcase student skills, to educate parents in Montessori learning, and more.

- Spring Piano Concerts
- Classroom Visitation Days
- Family Activities such as the Sock Hop
- Montessori Week
- Light Up for Learning - Glow Run
- Walk-a-thon
- Knowledge-a-thon and Basket Raffle
- End of Year Family Event

School Policies and Procedures:

Registration

Registration is held each spring, with deadlines that will be publicized. Once your child is enrolled at Alliance, you will not need to complete this registration each year, however, you will need to complete the open enrollment form if you are living outside of the Neenah Joint School District. Further, if you have additional children who will be attending Alliance, they will need to be registered properly when the time comes. Siblings are given first priority each year, but MUST be registered on time in the spring.

School Hours

Class is in session Monday through Thursday 8:00 A.M. to 3:05 P.M. and Friday 8:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M. Supervision on the playground will begin at 7:40 A.M. each day. Students will line up and be admitted into the building at 7:50 A.M. each day. Students and parents will not be admitted inside the building prior to 7:50 A.M. We encourage students to be at school at 7:50, so they are settled and ready to learn at 8:00. Students arriving after 8:00 will be marked tardy.

After school, playground supervision is provided until 3:15. At that time, students without rides are escorted into the building to call home. Please, however, make every effort to pick up your child by 3:15 pm or to notify the office/teacher of your late arrival.

Rain/Cold Weather Entrance

In the event of rain while school is starting, students will enter through the gym entrance located on the east side of the building. Students will sit under supervision in the bleachers. Students will follow this same instruction if the temperature is below zero degrees.

Entrance to the Building

The main entrance to the building is located on the north side of the building. All doors into the school remain locked during the day.

Visitors to the School

Visitors must enter through the main door located on the north side of the building. The door will be unlocked from the office after the visitor is identified through the intercom system. Everyone entering the school must check in at the office immediately and receive/wear a lanyard during their stay.

Contacting the School During the Day

You may call the school at anytime during the day, however calls to the teachers during class time should be kept to a minimum. Our teachers need to focus on classroom instruction and the needs of our students, with as few interruptions as possible. To minimize disruption, teachers can usually be reached very effectively via email, or you may leave a message for them with the school secretary.

Birthday Guidelines

Please use the school directory to obtain addresses and phone numbers to invite students to private parties. Invitations will not be allowed to come to school unless every child in the classroom is invited to the party. We do not want children's feelings to be hurt by not being invited.

You are not obligated to bring a birthday treat for the class. However, if you choose to do so, please call or email your child's teacher ahead of time to arrange a day to bring it in. If food allergies are present in the classroom, the teacher will inform you. Please be respectful of any allergies and do not bring treats that cannot be enjoyed by all of the children.

Healthy Snack Guidelines

Snack policies at Alliance are left up to the individual teacher. In some cases, you may be asked to bring a snack for the class about once a month. In other classrooms, students may be permitted to bring a snack for themselves each day, if desired. The Neenah Joint School District strongly recommends that students consume only nutritionally complete foods while at school. Please make sure that any food your child brings for snack time is healthy.

Water bottles are permitted in our classrooms, with rules established by each teacher as to where they are kept during class time. We are all at our best when well rested and well nourished.

Lunch Information

Forms are available in the office for families with financial need, qualifying for the reduced lunch rate. Your child will have the opportunity each morning to choose their meal. Meal choices and a monthly calendar are available online at www.neenah.k12.wi.us. This will also be sent home with your child each month.

If your child is going to be late for school, but will be having hot lunch that day, you will need to notify the office of his/her meal choice so that this is accounted for. Likewise, if you will be joining your child for lunch and eating from the lunch service plan, you must purchase an adult meal ticket ahead of time and notify the office by 8:00 am on the morning of your planned visit. This cooperation ensures that we are not wasting or running short of meals.

Classroom Ground Rules

Ground rules are determined by each class and/or teacher at the beginning of each school year. These rules help to create and maintain a cooperative learning environment. It is typical for them to be posted in the classroom for all to see. It is especially helpful to be aware of these rules if you plan to be helping in the classroom.

Dress Code

Your child will be most comfortable in play clothes. Students will often be sitting on the floor, so knit shorts should be worn under skirts, in all grades. School policy does not permit spaghetti strap or halter tops, or flip-flop shoes.

Each child should have a pair of gym shoes that are kept at school unless otherwise notified.

As the weather changes, students are expected to be dressed for the weather in the appropriate jacket, coat, and/or other attire. Please make sure you label all of your child's outdoor clothing with first and last names so that it may be returned if lost.

Lost and Found

A lost and found area is located outside the main office. Items that are misplaced or left behind will be placed in this station and children/parents may search there for missing items. This is emptied out once or twice a year (with plenty of notice) so be sure to check it when you are in the building.

Attendance

In order to maintain consistency regular attendance is required. If your child is absent more than 5 days in one semester, you can expect to be contacted by the administration to identify and resolve the problem. If absent more than 10 days in one year, parents must provide a medical absence verification request. The absence verification form can be found on the Neenah Joint School District website. If your child is absent without an excuse for part or all of five days in one semester, the student is considered to be a habitual truant, therefore habitual truancy procedure must be followed.

If your child will be absent for the day you must contact the office immediately in the morning. This is a state law created to help ensure the safety of our children. If you do not contact the office on a day when your child is absent, you will be contacted by our staff.

Tardiness

Please try to make sure your child is on time for school each day. Many important issues are covered first thing in the morning, and our students are often in instructional classes right away as well.

If your child is going to be late, please call the office. Hot lunch tallies are taken first thing in the morning, and your child will need to be accounted for if they are to receive a hot lunch.

When your child arrives late at school, you will need to sign them in at the office before they attend class. If your child is tardy more than five times in one semester, you can expect to be contacted by the school administration to try and resolve the problem. If your child arrives more than 10 minutes late, it is recorded as an absence.

Check In/Out Procedures

While we hope you will schedule doctor and other important appointments after school hours, we recognize this is not always possible. If you need to remove your child from class for any reason during the day, you will need to sign them out in the office. Upon returning to school, you will need to sign your child back in. Whenever possible, please inform your child's teacher if you will be removing your child for appointments or other reasons.

Medications at School

Inhalers, medications, and even cough drops must be kept in the office. You will need to complete a form (available in the office) for each medication. These will be stored in the school office and used as necessary per your instructions. Please pick up all unused medications from the office at the end of the school year.

Bus Pickup

NJSD does not provide bus transportation to or from charter schools. You are responsible to provide transportation for your student to and from school. If you have made arrangements for a bus pick them up after school (from a child care center, etc.) you will need to inform the school. Bus pickup is located on Forest Avenue immediately in front of the school. Your child will need to be ready as quickly as possible after school to line up for their bus.

Carpooling

Alliance Charter does not have a formal carpool program. However, you may make arrangements with other parents on your own. Please keep your child's teacher and the office informed regarding your carpool arrangements so that they are aware of whom your child is expected to go home with.

Parking Lots

There are two parking lots at Alliance/Roosevelt. The large lot on the south side (Water Street) is to be used for long-term parking. Both the smaller lot on the north side (Forest Avenue) and large lot on the south side (Water Street) are for quick child drop off in the morning. Use the designated round-about drop off area in the south lot in the mornings. Make sure each child exits the passenger side of the vehicle when using the round-about drop off. In both lots you must park in a valid parking spot. Parents may also park on the playground in the designated areas Mondays-Thursdays during dismissal times. You may not stop in the flow of traffic to let your children out of the car.

Please consider the safety of our children at all times. Drive slowly and with great caution in the parking lots, and be patient with others who are doing the same.

School Closings and Delays

In the event that the school needs to close early, will be canceled, or will be delayed due to weather or other circumstances, announcements will be made by local news channels on television and radio. Please check these stations if the weather appears likely to create a problem.

District Calendar

A copy of the Neenah Joint School District calendar is available at www.neenah.k12.wi.us and at the back of this handbook. Please refer to that calendar for anticipated teacher in-service days, conferences, and vacation time.

Name and Address Changes

A school directory is printed up at the beginning of each year. In the event of name or address changes, please inform our school secretary so that all records may be kept up to date.

Home/School Communication:**Newsletters**

You can expect to receive weekly newsletters from the school principal. Individual teachers may choose to send home newsletters/e-letters as well. It is our goal to keep you as informed as possible about the events and happenings at school.

Web Site

Please visit our website at <http://www.neenah.k12.wi.us/schools/alliance/>

There, you will find information about Alliance, current Advisory Council minutes, news and events, and student and parent resources.

Conferences

Official parent/teacher conferences are held twice per year, in the fall and spring. These will be scheduled and you will receive a notice beforehand.

Parent and Teacher Discussions and Appointments

If you have issues or concerns about your child that you wish to discuss with the teacher, please request appointments as needed rather than waiting for a conference time. Your questions and input are critical to your child's success, and we want to be sure we are meeting their needs appropriately. If you wish to have such a conversation with your child's teacher, please contact them and schedule a time to meet. Quick meetings before or after school do not always allow the teacher to be as focused or candid as necessary, and may impose upon the teacher's necessary preparatory time.

Our teachers make every effort to meet the needs of students and families. However, if after working with your child's teacher, an issue remains unresolved, please contact the school principal.

Parent Resources

Montessori parent resource materials are available in the school library for check out. You may check out materials from the library as you wish, using your child's name. Games for children of all ages, parenting books, Montessori videos, and other educational materials are all available for you to use.

Scholastic Book Orders

Scholastic Book orders may come home once a month depending on how often your child's teacher chooses to participate in this program. You are never under obligation to purchase books through this program, however, it does offer an inexpensive way to purchase books for your home libraries.

Book order forms and checks should be enclosed in a labeled envelope by the due date listed and returned to your child's teacher. For every item purchased, Scholastic provides us with classroom points to purchase books and other materials for the classroom.

Volunteering at Alliance Charter Keys to Success

Thanks so much for everything you do. As a volunteer at Alliance, you are making a big difference in the education of our children. We are able to include many wonderful programs during the course of each year, but they are only possible with the help and support of parents like you. Thank you!

General Information

Be consistent: While there may be opportunities to volunteer on an occasional basis, teachers are often looking for classroom volunteers who can be in class consistently; for example, every Tuesday from 1-3. Please set a schedule with the teacher and stick to it. Our teachers and students rely on you to be present at your scheduled time. If you will be absent at your scheduled time, please get a message to the teacher so they are aware.

Do what needs to be done: Duties in the classroom will vary greatly depending on your teacher, the day, and the time. Teachers will need help with many different things, anything from hanging pictures and correcting papers, to monitoring work time and working one on one with students.

Remember you are there as an assistant to the teacher: If there is something you are not comfortable doing, please let your teacher know. However, please remember that you are there as an assistant to her. Everything you do, no matter how small it may seem, is a big help!

Review and stay aware of the many volunteer opportunities: So many opportunities are available at Alliance. If working in your child's classroom does not fit, please keep in mind the many things you can do to make a difference at Alliance.

Classroom Guidelines

Know the classroom ground rules: Every class/teacher will establish their own ground rules to help ensure the classroom runs smoothly. Often, the students help create this list at the beginning of the year. Please check with the teacher to ensure you are aware of these rules – and follow them.

What happens in the classroom is confidential: It is of the utmost importance that you do not share any information about students – whether it is behavioral, academic, or otherwise, outside of school. Information shared between the teacher and you is completely confidential.

Ask questions when you need to: Your presence in the classroom frees up the teacher so she may accomplish other tasks, such as providing lessons to students. But, if you have questions, please ask.

Work with all students as needed, not just your child: It is often so interesting to see what your child is working on, that it becomes challenging to move to other students. Please limit your interactions with your own child as much as possible, and remember you are in class to help all of the students.

You are encouraged to volunteer in classrooms other than your child's: Sometimes this is easier. All of our teachers, including our support staff, would welcome extra help. If you would like to be in school, but not a regular volunteer in your own child's classroom, please look at the other opportunities available to you.

Make sure students are doing the work assigned, and that you are not doing it for them: As a parent, it is easy to forget this and be overly helpful. Remember that students need to do every step on their own, from logging on to the computer, to learning to tie their shoes, to looking up words in the dictionary in order to find the proper spelling. Your teacher will likely help you to know where the line is, based on the class or student and the projects at hand.

Students have the right to make choices within limits: Be aware that you will often find them working on many different projects, within the same classroom and/or grade level. This is one of the reasons it is so helpful to have you in the classroom to help keep them on task in assigned work.

Establish an easy way for to communicate with the teacher about the day's events: Talk with your teacher about an effective way to do this. She may have a system in place, or you may work together to come up with one. Sharing information in a confidential way, about what took place while you were assisting, or any concerns you may have, is very helpful.

Alliance Charter Elementary
Introduction to Montessori Philosophy and Educational Methods

“We seek to sow life in the child rather than theories, to help him in his growth, mental and emotional as well as physical, and for that we must offer grand and lofty ideas to the human mind.” Maria Montessori

What Is Montessori? (from an American Montessori Society brochure)

The fundamental tenet of the Montessori philosophy is that a child learns best in a social environment that supports his or her unique development.

How Did It Begin?

Dr. Maria Montessori, the creator of what is called “The Montessori Method of Education”, based this new education on her scientific observations of young children’s behavior. As the first woman physician to graduate from the University of Rome, Montessori became involved with education as a doctor treating children. In 1907 she was invited to open a child care center for the children of desperately poor families in the San Lorenzo slums of Rome. She called it “A Children’s House”, and based the program on her observations that young children learn best in a homelike setting, filled with developmentally appropriate materials that provide experiences that contribute to the growth of self-motivated, independent learners.

Montessori’s dynamic theories included such revolutionary premises as:

1. Children are to be respected as different from adults and as individuals who are different from one another.
2. Children create themselves through purposeful activity.
3. The most important years for learning are from birth to age six.
4. Children possess unusual sensitivity and mental powers for absorbing and learning from their environment, which includes people as well as materials.

She carried her message throughout the world, including the United States as early as 1912. After an enthusiastic first response, interest in the U.S. waned until a reintroduction of the method in the mid-1950’s, followed by the organization of the American Montessori Society in 1960.

What Makes Montessori Education Unique?

1. The Montessori materials. Dr. Montessori’s observations of the kinds of things which children enjoy and go back to led her to design a number of multi-sensory, sequential and self-correcting materials which facilitate the learning of practical skills and abstract ideas.
2. The teacher. Originally called a “Directress”, the Montessori teacher functions as designer of the environment, resource person, role model, demonstrator, record-keeper and meticulous observer of each child’s behavior and growth.

How Does It Work?

Each Montessori class, from toddlers through high school, operates on the principle of freedom within limits. Every program has its set of ground rules which differ from age to age, but is always based on core Montessori beliefs—respect for each other and for the environment.

Children are free to work at their own pace with materials they have chosen, either alone or with others. The teacher relies on her observations of the children to determine which new activities and materials she may introduce to an individual child or to a small or large group. The aim is to encourage active, self-directed learning and to strike a balance of individual mastery with small group collaboration within the whole group community.

From the American Montessori Society, 281 Park Ave. South, New York, N.Y. 10010

At Alliance, students have time for both self-directed and teacher-directed work. Active learning, problem solving, the development of a strong foundation in reading, writing, and mathematics, the integration of subject matter especially in the cultural and science areas, and active parent involvement, are encouraged.

For further information: See the American Montessori Society (AMS) website and the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) website. Alliance has videos and books on Montessori available for checkout through the parent resource library. Make sure to look at Alliance's website on the Neenah Joint School District site as well.

Quotes from Maria Montessori:

Whoever touches the life of the child touches the most sensitive point of a whole which has roots in the most distant past and climbs toward the infinite future.

Education is a natural process carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words, but by experiences in the environment.

The secret of good teaching is to regard the child's intelligence as a fertile field in which seeds may be sown, to grow under the heat of flaming imagination.

The essential thing is to arouse such an interest that it engages the child's whole personality.

If we could say, "We are respectful and courteous in our dealing with children, we treat them as we should like to be treated ourselves," we should have mastered a great educational principle and be setting an example of good education.

It is well to cultivate a friendly feeling towards error; to treat it as a companion inseparable from our lives, as something having a purpose, which it truly has.

Since adults have no concept of the importance of physical activity for the child, they put a damper on it as a cause of disturbance.

The first essential for the child's development is concentration. The child who concentrates is immensely happy.

We must support as much as possible the child's desires for activity; not wait on him, but educate him to be independent.

Respect all the reasonable forms of activity in which the child engages and try to understand them.

The more the capacity to concentrate is developed, the more often the profound tranquility in work is achieved, then the clearer will be the manifestation of discipline within the child.

Education starts at birth.

If the idea of the universe is presented to the child in the right way, it will do more for him than just arouse his interest, for it will create in him admiration and wonder, a feeling loftier than any interest and more satisfying.

It is self-evident that the possession of and contact with real things brings, above all, a real quantity of knowledge.

How often is the soul of man - especially in childhood - deprived because he is not allowed to come in contact with nature.

What advice can we give to mothers? Their children need to work at an interesting occupation; they should not be helped unnecessarily, nor interrupted, once they have begun to do something intelligent.

The child is both hope and a promise for mankind.

