

# School Handbook

2023 - 2024

“Building Faith, Knowledge and Character”



6339 Atlantic Avenue, Kalamazoo, MI 49009

[www.giftofgracemontessori.org](http://www.giftofgracemontessori.org)

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# Welcome

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Choosing a school program that is right for your child is overwhelming. Simply put, education isn't a one-size fits all endeavor. Every child has unique and special interests, needs and talents, and the childhood years are an important time of discovery and growth for all.

God has taken my heart and mind on a new learning journey, guiding me to reimagine what has already been created. A hybrid school model that blends the 'best of both worlds,' drawing out the top elements of both private schooling and homeschooling. To modernize the past. To add in the future.

I believe the right school has many benefits. It is...

- ❖ Comprehensive.
- ❖ Academically Robust.
- ❖ Experiential.
- ❖ Balanced.
- ❖ Wholesome.
- ❖ Beautiful.

In 2022, I rebranded Gift of Grace Montessori from a preschool, to a hybrid one-room schoolhouse serving children in PreKindergarten - Lower Elementary. I wanted to create something different - a unique schooling option for families in need of a different educational and social experience.

- ❖ A school that is as comfortable and inviting as a home, a peaceful atmosphere of calm, order, and joy where multi-ages learn together.
- ❖ A school where learning differences, learning styles, strengths, weaknesses, and fundamental child development are honored.
- ❖ A school with the vision of helping children live every moment with love, grace and gratitude.
- ❖ Most importantly, a school that honors these educational values: leadership skills, mentorships, teamwork, diversity, compromise, cooperation, and adaptivity.

Communication is key to a successful partnership. This booklet was compiled to provide important program information and guidelines that you can reference throughout the school year. As always, you may contact me via phone, email or text anytime. I look forward to partnering with you to guide your child's growth and development.

*Stacey Eley*, Owner, Director and Head Teacher

# Overview of the School

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Simply stated, Gift of Grace Montessori is a hybrid school, *blending the best of private and homeschool together*. Our mission is to build faith, knowledge, and character while planting the spiritual and educational seeds needed to raise a child for a lifetime of growth; *sowing the seeds today, in the hope of fruit tomorrow*.

We are an independently owned one-room schoolhouse, operating within Voyage Church serving children in *PreKindergarten - Lower Elementary*. Our modern-day schoolhouse embraces the whole child approach, "mind, body, heart," leaving room for play, exploration, fun, social interaction, curiosity, wonder, stillness, and rest.

We strive to be a *"home away from home"*. We value the trust that parents place in us and are committed to developing confident, caring, knowledgeable children with the necessary skills needed to become leaders in their families and communities. Children are *welcomed, loved just as they are, and valued for the unique gifts they bring*.

**WE EMBRACE.** Loving each child for who they are.

**WE EMPOWER.** Trusting each child's desire to learn.

**WE EDUCATE.** Guiding with patience and enthusiasm.

We use **The Good and the Beautiful curriculum** for core academic subjects as it beautifully aligns with Gift of Grace's mission, *"to teach academics while connecting children to the good and the beautiful in life and in learning."* All subjects are taught from a Christian worldview and include: practical life, language arts, math, science, geography, history, art, music, and physical education.

*LOVING radically. FORGIVING biblically. RESPONDING graciously. LEADING with a servant's heart.*

# Goals

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## **At Gift of Grace Montessori our goal is to:**

1. Create a family atmosphere where children interact and learn life-long skills of living and working together in harmony.
2. Communicate the basic truths - God is real. He created us. He loves us and cares about our needs.
3. Assist and guide each child's development toward becoming a confident and productive individual.
4. Cultivate core values, such as: responsibility, honesty, integrity, kindness, forgiveness, compassion, and respect for self and others.
5. Glorify God through the modeling of Biblical principles - prayer, praise, and example.
6. Foster unity and dignity among staff, children, parents, and friends.
7. Provide an assortment of learning materials designed to invite children to touch, think, and experience.
8. Guide children to discover, develop, strengthen, and use their God-given gifts.
9. Prepare children to be creative learners by developing habits of initiative, persistence, sense of order, curiosity, and concentration.
10. Model and interact with one another with courtesy, graciousness, and gratitude.
11. Create an environment of cooperation rather than competition.
12. Balance work and fun, fostering children to like what they are learning and create a hunger for more learning.

# What Makes Montessori Unique?

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The Montessori Method was created by Maria Montessori (1870-1952). She was an Italian physician, educator, philosopher, and three-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee. She once said, "**Free the child's potential, and you will transform him into the world.**" Dr. Maria Montessori wanted to help improve education and spread love for learning with others.

1. **A Responsive Prepared Environment.** Children are respected as unique individuals - different from adults, but not less important or valued as members of the community. The environment is designed to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of the children within the class. Teachers adapt the environment through modifying the selection of educational materials available, the physical layout and equipment in the classroom, and shifting the tone of the class to fit the ever-changing needs of the children. There is a conscious effort to design the classroom as a 'children's house,' making it as comfortable and inviting as a home.
2. **A Focus on Human Tendencies.** Maria Montessori based her philosophy of education on the human tendency within the child to explore, to move, to share with a group, to be independent and make decisions, to create order, to develop self control, to abstract ideas from experience, to use creative imagination, to work hard, to repeat, concentrate, and perfect one's efforts and creations. Each of these tendencies is considered carefully when designing the environment, preparing materials, and planning activities for the children.
3. **A Multiage Community of Learners - Cooperation and Collaboration.** The multiage community of learners allows for leadership, mentoring skills, and socialization between different age groups. This creates a "family" like group where older children model and help care for younger children, and younger children look up to and learn from the older children. Varying levels of ability blend easily in a multiage setting, no child feels left behind and everyone learns at their own pace.
4. **The Process of Learning | Evaluation of Student Progress.** In the classroom there are three stages of learning a new concept or lesson: introduction to a concept, processing the concept, and mastering the concept. The Montessori curriculum is carefully structured and sequenced based on the developmental needs of each individual child. Teachers maintain records of each student's individual progress. Parent teacher conferences are held twice a year to discuss student progress.

# School Hours and Schedule

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Gift of Grace Montessori is open **Monday thru Friday** from **9:00am to 3:15pm** during the standard school year, Sept - May.

The **first day of school** is the **Tuesday, September 5** and the **last day of school** is **Friday, June 7**. Summer (vacation bible school) camps may be offered during the months of June, July, and August based on interest.

## The school will be closed on the following days/holidays:

- Thanksgiving - November 22 - 24
- Christmas and New Year's (winter break) - December 22 - January 5
- Good Friday (spring break) - March 29 - April 5
- Memorial Day - May 29

## Daily Routine

8:30 AM	Early Arrival
9:00 AM	School Starts
9:00 – 11:15 AM	Group Gathering (whole group lessons) Independent Work Period (individual and small group lessons) Self-Serve Snack
11:15 AM - 12:00 PM	Outdoor Recess
12:00 - 1:30 PM	Lunch, Read Aloud, Quiet Time
1:30 – 3:15 PM	Enrichment Activities (art, music, physical education) Independent Work Period (individual and small group lessons)
3:15 PM	Dismissal

# Enrollment Process

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Gift of Grace Montessori considers itself more than just a school, we consider ourselves a true **community of families that share a vision, values, and goals** for our children. Beginning the admissions process and learning about our school is a process of learning about each other. Our primary goal in the admissions process is to help each family find the right fit. Honesty in any relationship is key to its success. Our goal is to present our program as truthfully as possible, help families to grasp the nature of our school and what we have to offer, and allow them to weigh all the factors as they consider whether our school is indeed the right match for them. Though not required, a tour of our school is recommended.

Children must be **four years of age** (by September 1st) and are able to **independently take care of all toileting needs**. When no openings are available children will be placed in the applicant group waiting list.

Following the multiage Montessori classroom model, Gift of Grace Montessori is committed to creating a **balanced learning environment** for all students. We are committed to integrating and accommodating children with special needs into our program, in accordance with the Montessori philosophy and appropriate childhood practices. In some circumstances, Gift of Grace Montessori is not the “right fit” for a child and family. Gift of Grace Montessori reserves the right not to accept a child into the program or to ask a child to leave the program based on the school’s inability to meet the needs of the child. We will support the family in finding a program better suited to the child’s specific needs.

## **Enrollment requirements, kept on file for each child are as follows:**

1. Enrollment Form
2. Child Information Record including Emergency Contact and Release of Child
3. Current Health Appraisal (signed and dated by child’s physician) and current Immunization Record



# Tuition Policy

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Gift of Grace Montessori strives to keep tuition affordable while offering a premium program for children in Kalamazoo and the surrounding communities. We use Brightwheel, a secure, online system for receiving tuition payments. Parents will receive an email inviting them to use billing at Gift of Grace Montessori. Instructions and links to set-up will be included.

Gift of Grace Montessori operates on the tuition and fees paid for services. It is the responsibility of each family to ensure that tuition payments arrive on time. Tuition fees reflect an academic school year. There is no reduction in fees due to illness, absence, emergency situations, or inclement weather.

## **Annual Tuition:**

- **Three Day Program (half/full day): \$5250**
- **Five Day Program (full/half day): \$7250**

**Additional Fee: \$150 materials fee** for all families (paid annually)

## **There are two options for tuition payments.**

Option One: Pay the first semester on or before the first of September and the second semester on or before the first of January.

Option Two: Ten monthly payments (September 1st through June 1st).

**Withdrawal/Dismissal** - If a parent wishes to withdraw their child for situations such as moving out of the area, they are required to provide a thirty (30) day written notice and are financially obligated for the month in which the dated notice is submitted. Gift of Grace Montessori is dedicated to maintaining a safe, harmonious environment for the optimum development of all enrolled children. We reserve the right to withdraw a child without notice, if the child's participation in the program creates a direct threat to the safety of the child, other children, or the staff of Gift of Grace Montessori.

# Discipline

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The root word of discipline is “disciple,” which means to lead forth. Discipline means learning. It means a chance to learn how to live in a social world. Our Montessori-inspired approach to discipline is to help children learn they are responsible for what they do and that their actions and choices have consequences. The goals of discipline are **self-control, responsibility, and self-discipline.**

## General School and Classroom Guidelines

Gift of Grace Montessori supports a philosophy based on mutual respect to all members of community. It is our intention to create a safe, supportive, and nurturing environment. There are some basic expectations we have for all members of our community.

1. Walk safely and calmly in the school.
2. Use quiet and calm voices.
3. Be kind and loving to others.
4. Respect privacy, concentration, and personal belongings.
5. Take responsibility for the care of our school environment.

## We utilize a variety of discipline techniques to meet the needs of different situations:

- Modeling desired behavior
- Problem solving skills that teach children to use their words, not their hands
- Careful classroom structure and ground rules
- Clear and consistent communications of behavioral expectations
- Giving children opportunities to make appropriate choices regarding their behavior
- Redirection to an appropriate activity
- Cool Offs and solution-oriented logical consequences

# Health and Safety

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All children enrolled in the program must submit a **written statement signed by a health care provider** verifying the child is able to participate, currently appears to be free from contagious or communicable disease, and is receiving health care including appropriate health examinations in accordance with the American Academy of Pediatrics schedule and examinations. Such documentation must state that the child has received age appropriate immunizations in accordance with the **Michigan State Vaccine Requirements**. Exemptions may be granted for medical and other objections, provided that the waiver forms are properly prepared, signed and delivered to the school. Forms for these exemptions are available at Kalamazoo County Health and Community Services. To make an appointment, please contact (269) 373-5198.

Our vigilant approach to safeguarding children starts with ensuring that the building and equipment meet all applicable safety guidelines and requirements. Team members are trained to be watchful and take precautions to prevent accidents, injuries, and incidents. Children receive instruction on “safe practice” at school, and they are guided away from hazardous behavior. We approach safety as a matter of continuous improvement. Should your child have an accident or suffer a minor injury while at school, basic first aid will be administered and you will be notified. If your child needs non-emergency medical care, you will be called promptly so you can arrange for him or her to be seen by a doctor. Appropriate conduct is expected from children at all times. We use **incident reports** to document behavioral issues that require intervention beyond redirection, or an incident where a child was hurt or negatively affected. This report is shared with parents of children involved in the behavior or incident on Brightwheel. No children’s names are included in these reports other than the child of the parent receiving the report.

In the event that a child needs **emergency medical attention**, 9-1-1 will be called. The parent or person responsible will be notified. Teachers are current in **CPR/First Aid training** and will administer aid whenever necessary.

**Medication Form** - A designated person is responsible for the administration of all medications including storing, supervising ingestion, and recording the dosage. The administration of medication is not permitted unless the child’s parent completes a **medical consent form**. Prescription medication will only be administered from a container dispensed by a pharmacy and non-prescription medication will only be administered from a prepackaged container labeled for use by the manufacturer and labeled with the enrolled child’s name. It is **NOT acceptable to send medication or vitamins in a child’s backpack, lunchbox, or pant’s pocket.**

# Health and Safety Continued

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Gift of Grace Montessori teaches and models sanitation and **healthy personal hygiene habits**. As defined, hand washing means to cleanse the hands with soap and warm running water for at least 20 seconds. Everyone is expected to wash their hands with soap and running water at the beginning of each day, when they are dirty, after using the restroom, before and after food handling or eating, after contact with bodily secretion or fluid, and after coming in from the outdoors. **Guidelines for hand washing** are posted in food preparation areas, in bathrooms, and at hand washing sinks. When soap and running water are not available during an outing, hand sanitizers, and/or single-use wipes may be used as a temporary measure.

Gift of Grace Montessori uses **universal precautions** when dealing with infectious material by using non-latex gloves when performing any duties that involve bodily fluids. Any clean up materials will be disposed of properly to insure safety for all. The classroom, equipment, supplies, and furnishings accessible to children will be cleaned and disinfected daily. **Pesticides** will not be used on the property while school is in session. Parents will be notified 48 hours in advance of pesticide application with a sign on the door and via Brightwheel. Advance notice will include target pest or purpose, approximate location, date of application and contact information.

**Natural Disaster Plan:** We have special, practiced procedures for events such as fires and tornadoes. School evacuation plans and procedures are posted in the classroom and will be followed in the event of a fire or other event that requires us to quickly evacuate the building. In the event that it is needed to evacuate the building due to a local emergency, we will proceed to the closest safe building as directed by emergency personnel. The school will only be evacuated in the event the building is deemed not safe for occupancy by the police/fire department. Emergency information will be communicated through Brightwheel.

Gift of Grace Montessori will conduct quarterly **fire drills** and two **tornado drills** between the months of April through October. All team members are trained at least twice a year on their duties and responsibilities for all emergency procedures including: fire, tornado, natural or man-made disasters, serious accidents or injuries, and crisis situations.

Gift of Grace Montessori is an **alcohol, tobacco and drug free environment**. This includes smoke-less tobacco and e-cigarettes.

# Illness Policy

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Our illness policy has been developed with the primary concern for the well-being of the children as well as within the requirements of the Michigan Department of Human Services. Please check your children for signs of illness before bringing them to school. **If your child is feeling ill, he/she must be kept at home** until the infection period is over and is feeling well again. If your child becomes ill at school, he/she will be isolated in comfort with supervision, and you will be called to pick up your child as soon as possible.

**Children (volunteers and team members) are not to attend school if one or more of the following conditions exist:**

- Fever - Anything **over 100.4 degrees F** is considered a fever. Child's temperature must be normal (98.6 degrees) for 24 hours (without medication) before returning to school.
- Diarrhea or Vomiting - Child must be free of symptoms for a **full 24 hours**.
- Upper Respiratory Illness - including congestion, constant nasal discharge, mucus in the eyes, colored mucus in the nose, severe uncontrolled productive cough (raising phlegm).
- Skin Infections or Rashes - including head lice, scabies, ringworm, impetigo, measles, chicken pox, herpes, etc.
- Communicable Diseases – including measles, whooping cough, etc. reportable to the Department of Public Health.
- Conjunctivitis ("pink eye") and mouth sores with drooling

If your child has been prescribed an antibiotic, he/she must have the antibiotic in his/her system for a **full 24 hours** before attending school. This includes ophthalmic antibiotics for conjunctivitis (pink eye).

We ask that you please **send a Brightwheel message** if you are keeping your child at home for any contagious condition. As with all matters, confidentiality will be respected in regards to children's health. We will always announce contagious conditions to watch out for, but we will never disclose who has a said condition. Gift of Grace Montessori **reserves the right to send a child home because of reasonable suspicion of illness.**

# Food and Nutrition

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Meal time is an exceptional part of our day at Gift of Grace Montessori. Children enjoy this special time together encouraging the important aspect of grace and courtesy in each child's Montessori experience.

Gift of Grace Montessori provides a wholesome and healthy morning snack following a **weekly themed menu**.

- Muffin Monday
- Toasty Tuesday
- Waffle Wednesday
- Thirsty Thursday
- Fruity Friday

All children need to **bring a packed lunch to school** each day. Healthy lunches (that promote growth and development) consist of a protein, a fruit, a grain & a vegetable. It is of preference that all lunches and foods brought to school be in reusable containers that children can manage to open. The lunch container should include a "cool pack," as the lunches will not be stored in the refrigerator.

Gift of Grace Montessori is committed to modeling healthy eating habits and are **respectful of those who have food sensitivities**.

Occasionally, you may be asked to supply snack items to have on hand or an item needed for a practical life/ cooking activity for the week. If there is a particular food that is traditionally served for a holiday or special occasion in your family, we are happy to share those traditions with our children.

# Drop Off and Pick-Up

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The **doors to the building** are kept **locked at all times**. Doors will be **open at 8:30 AM**.

As a school, we ask that all children **arrive to school on time**; this allows them to take part in opening activities for the day with the rest of their class. It is very disruptive for the classroom if a child arrives late in the day. Please arrange any late arrivals in advance.

Each child will have an individual hook to hold their belongings (backpack/coat). Indoor/outdoor shoes will be kept on designated shoe mats.

**Late Pick-up** - The school day **ends at 3:00 pm**. For unexpected delays in pickup due to inclement weather or unforeseen circumstances, we extend a **first time, one time, no charge policy**.

We respectfully request that parents who are not able to pick up their children by the designated pick-up time, make alternate pickup arrangements. If pickup occurs beyond the designated pick-up time, parents will be issued an invoice for a **late fee charge of \$25** after the designated pick-up time.

Children will be **released only** to a parent or to persons whose names are listed on the Emergency Form. Therefore, in order to provide for emergency situations that prevent you from picking up your child, be certain to include those individuals whom you would authorize in such events. Parents should advise teachers in advance, through Brightwheel, if a person who is not listed on the original form is to pick up the child. Identification will be requested of these authorized persons picking up children. Children will not be released without written authorization.

# Communication and Involvement

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It is our hope we will become **partners in the education** of your child/ren. **Open communication is vital** and cannot be overestimated. Since you know your child best, we ask that you share any information that may help us to understand your child better and to meet his/her particular needs. As always, we will respect confidentiality.

**We will keep you informed in the following ways:**

1. Brightwheel - **mobile app** downloaded for free on iPhones and Androids (photos, events, activities, messaging, billing)
2. Informal Chats at arrival and departure time
3. Conferences
4. Social Media (Facebook)

We ask that you please **send a message** in the morning whenever your child **will be out for the day, coming in late, and/or leaving school early**. When your child arrives for the day, the arrival time will be recorded by a teacher. The departure time, also noted by a teacher, will be recorded.

**Parent conferences** are offered at least once a year. Teachers will observe and record information on your child's development. We will share the information with you, learn from your knowledge of your child, and together plan for more opportunities to grow.

**Parent involvement** is encouraged. We plan parent nights as well as family activities throughout the year. We also encourage parents to come to school to demonstrate any interesting hobby or talent to the children. Siblings are also encouraged to participate in family events.

Be a **role model** for your children. Show respect for them, their classmates, parents of classmates, and teachers. Our most fundamental behavioral guidelines for the children are "**Respect yourself, respect others, and respect the environment.**" We expect the same from adults, parents, and staff, at all times and in all relationships within the school community. This includes speech and outward behavior. Support your child by speaking of her/his teachers, classmates, and the school in positive terms. Respect and abide by the school's policies and procedures. Honor your commitments. Look for ways to make a positive



# Additional Information

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Gift of Grace Montessori takes great pride in the competency of our team. Our goal is to maintain the highest integrity and professionalism, while making every child and family feel loved. Teachers are **First Aid and CPR certified** and maintains at least 16 clock hours of professional training per year in topics such as child development, communication, and curriculum activities. The **head teacher** is certified and holds a Bachelor's Degree from an accredited university in the field of Elementary Education with Early Childhood specialization. In addition, all team members, including volunteers undergo a **comprehensive criminal background check**, including FBI fingerprinting.

**Child Abuse, Neglect, and Sexual Abuse Policy** - Per state law, Gift of Grace Montessori is required to inform Child Protective Services at the Department of Human Services of any suspected abuse or neglect of children. By law, a suspicion of child abuse means that the reporter has "reasonable cause to believe" or "reasonable cause to know or suspect" that a child is being maltreated physically, emotionally or mentally.

**School Closings** - In the event of a weather emergency or unforeseen school closure, we will send information through Brightwheel. We encourage you to use your own judgment when deciding whether to venture out in questionable weather and road conditions.

**Bathroom Policy** - All children enrolled at Gift of Grace Montessori must be fully trained and able to **manage all aspects of toileting independently**. Naturally, mishaps do occur and the teachers will handle these situations with sensitivity and understanding.

**Birthdays** are special days and we enjoy celebrating them at school. We practice the favorite Montessori tradition of creating a picture timeline of your child's life. Please send in pictures of your child at birth, and each year after, so the entire class can see how he or she has grown or changed. Every birthday child will be honored by participating in the birthday walk where the child (carrying a model of the earth) carries the earth around the sun (a flameless candle in the center of our circle) for each year of his or her life.

# Additional Information Continued

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**Outdoor Play/Wear** - Time outdoors is an important part of a child's day. It provides the fresh air needed to insure good health and aids in the development of social and gross motor skills. Weather permitting, the children go outside every day. Please be sure your child has appropriate clothing for outdoor play - **durable, washable, weather appropriate**, and easy to put on. Appropriate shoes for school are sneakers or other casual shoes that may get dirty. In the winter, children play outside as long as the wind chill factor is above 0 degrees; if it is below that temperature, they will stay inside.

A supply of clothes for changes should be kept in your child's backpack. The children work with materials in the classroom that may result in their clothing becoming soiled or wet (water, paint, etc). They appreciate the option of changing into clean dry clothes on their own. Since self-sufficiency is encouraged, parents are asked to consider the ease with which their child is able to dress him or herself.

**Shoes** - The children use mats for a great deal of floor work and indoor shoes help to maintain the cleanliness of the environment, alleviating mud and dirt being tracked into the classroom with street shoes. We ask you to **provide indoor shoes** to be kept at school. Children should wear their outdoor shoes to (and from) school, changing into their indoor shoes while inside. These do not have to be expensive shoes! Velcro ties are strongly recommended for pre-tying age students.

**Quiet Time** - Rest allows our mind and body to renew and start with even more strength and focus. Gift of Grace Montessori believes in the importance of quiet (rest) time for a child's well-being on these busy days at school. Quiet time may involve, but is not limited to: looking at books, listening to music, mindfulness meditation (breathing exercises), or other such quiet activities.

**Field Trips** - During the course of the school year, field trips may be taken to local areas of interest in coordination with an area being studied in class or to take advantage of special community events. Parents will be notified in advance of an upcoming trip as well as any associated fees, and will be asked to help with transportation.