Sample Letter to Parents*

Dear Parents,

We are pleased to share with you an exciting announcement about our Language Curriculum. Based on a growing amount of current research, as well as authentic Montessori practice, this year we will begin a program of teaching cursive handwriting first! A few of the reasons why are outlined below. We are looking forward to watching our students writing and reading skills flourish! Be sure to look out for the beautiful cursive sandpaper letters on display in your child’s classroom, and you can look forward to seeing your child come home and show you their cursive in the coming months and years! We would love to share with you a more detailed description of the rationale and research behind this decision and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Warm Regards,

Why Cursive First:

- **Cursive handwriting is more natural and easier for young children!** In the United State cursive has traditionally been introduced in third grade, well past a child’s sensitive period for handwriting. In fact, children are able to learn the curved lines and flowing movements of cursive more easily than print handwriting which requires straight lines and perfect circles. Unlike print, cursive letters all begin at the same starting point (bottom left) and begin from one of only four basic approach strokes. Dr. Montessori discovered that introducing young children to cursive handwriting establishes the motor movements for writing when they are most easily absorbed.

- **Cursive writing enhances reading and writing skills.** In the Montessori Approach, children begin the skills of reading and writing at the same time when they work with the sandpaper letters. Writing then usually precedes reading as they practice formation of letters while learning their sounds. While printed letters are all separate, cursive letters go hand in hand with spaces only between words, reinforcing the beginning and ending of words. This provides a visual representation of how sounds come together to make a word, which encourages the blending of sounds within words- the foundation of reading! In addition, cursive letters all start from the left and continue towards the right, helping to establish left to right directionality for further reading and writing work.

- **Cursive writing minimizes common errors.** Writing cursive is a flowing, uninterrupted movement and therefore the pencil is not lifted until the end of the word. This minimizes spacing and sizing difficulties often found in early print handwriting. Cursive writing also eliminates confusion about letter reversals often found with the letters b,d,p, and q. In print those letters are essentially one shape turned in four different ways which causes some children difficulty with both reading and writing. In cursive each letter is distinct and this confusion is avoided.

- **Research has shown cursive handwriting provides an advantage for students in spelling, syntax, memory, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.** A study by Dr. Feland Meadows at Kenesaw University compared Montessori Primary students who learned cursive versus print and found that the students who learned cursive, “progressed at a faster rate and developed more effective writing and reading skills.” Another study of 718 students in Quebec found that
students who learned cursive instead of print benefited the most, particularly in spelling and syntax. Numerous other research studies have been done examining the benefits of handwriting instruction, particularly in cursive. We would be happy to share a list of research articles!

- **Children who learn cursive first have no difficulty reading in print or transferring to print once cursive is established.** Children who learn print first have a much harder time transferring to cursive at a later age and most often fail to transition completely. Because children are surrounded by print in books, signs and other printed material they learn to easily correspond print and cursive letters and easily learn print through association.

- **What about returning students who have already begun writing and reading in print?** Returning children who were learning manuscript will continue on their current reading path, and they will begin learning cursive handwriting after a few lessons on recognition of cursive letters. Many schools have found that children can transition easily from immature early print into beautiful cursive writing in a matter of a few months, if not sooner! The children will all continue to learn manuscript letter sounds because that’s what they use for reading material.

- **Many Montessori schools have made the switch to cursive first and all report resounding success.** We are excited to have our students join this growing move towards a more authentic Montessori approach, and natural progression of writing!

Resources:


*Sample Letter based off information provided by Tanelle Murphy: “Cursive First: Resources, Research, and Resources for Teaching Cursive First in Your Early Childhood Classroom.”