

COUNTRYSIDE MONTESSORI CHARTER SCHOOL



Student/Parent Handbook Grades 1–8 2026–2027

*Revised 8/17/26
Adopted by Board of Directors: 8/18/26*

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Section 1: Foundation

1.1 Mission

Our mission at Countryside Montessori Charter School (CMCS) is to provide a strong Montessori foundation in a safe, diverse, and collaborative community.

1.2 Vision

Igniting a community of lifelong learners by guiding and nurturing each whole child.

1.3 Core Values

CMCS enables our students and staff to achieve their full potential and become responsible citizens of the world by committing to the following core values:

- Peaceful Mindset — We ensure a peaceful and safe environment by practicing grace and courtesy, and we engage in honest, thoughtful communication.
- Respectful Reflection — We model respect for self, for others, and for the environment.
- Inclusive Community — We include all perspectives and treat every voice as valuable.
- Curiosity & Lifelong Learning — We cultivate curiosity in how we learn and interact with others.
- Responsible Independence — We embrace independence while upholding our shared values.

1.4 School of Choice

Charter schools are public schools of choice, as teachers, parents, and students choose them. They generally offer more flexibility in decision-making than traditional public schools. CMCS is accountable for complying with applicable rules and regulations, but our first priority is being accountable for academic results and for upholding the mission in our charter.

1.5 CMCS as a Pasco County Charter School and Florida Public School

CMCS is a public charter school authorized by, and located within, the Pasco County School District. Our Board of Directors has adopted the Pasco County Schools Student Progression Plan and Student Code of Conduct, applied to the extent they do not conflict with this handbook.

As a Florida public school, CMCS is required to follow all applicable state, federal, and local statutes.

1.6 Enrollment & Admissions

CMCS is open to any student residing in Florida, subject to space availability. When the number of applications exceeds available capacity in a grade level or classroom, admission is determined by random lottery, giving every eligible applicant an equal chance of selection, consistent with section 1002.33, Florida Statutes.

Florida law permits CMCS to give enrollment preference to certain categories before the general lottery, which may include siblings of currently enrolled students, children of governing board members, and children of CMCS employees. Our complete, current enrollment and lottery policy, including all preference categories and the waitlist process, is posted on the CMCS website and available from the front office.

Section 2: School Communications

2.1 Communication

CMCS is committed to openness, honesty, and public involvement in our communications. Good communication builds trust and supports teaching and learning. We keep families informed year-round through:

- ParentSquare: Posts, Monday Messages, Letters from the Leadership Team, Alerts, and Classroom Updates
- CMCS Radio, 107.9 FM
- The school website
- School-wide flyers, newsletters, memos, and emails
- Notes in a student's folder or agenda, and teacher calls/emails
- Progress reports, report cards, and conferences
- Social media (Facebook)

2.2 Parents' Bill of Rights

Florida law gives parents a defined set of rights in their child's education, set out in the Florida Parents' Bill of Rights, Chapter 1014, Florida Statutes. Among other things, parents have the right to:

- Direct the upbringing, education, and moral or religious training of their child;
- Make health care decisions for their child, unless otherwise limited by law;
- Access and review school and health records relating to their child;
- Receive advance notice of, and object to, certain instructional materials, health education content, or surveys, and to withdraw their child from portions of instruction as permitted by law;
- Consent — or decline to consent — in writing before certain services are provided to their child.

All parents must have a Parent Portal (myStudent) account to access student information. Providing consent for healthcare or other services through the portal does not waive a parent's right to access any records CMCS or Pasco County Schools maintains about their child. CMCS protects these rights under Chapter 1014, Florida Statutes, as well as under Florida's student records law (s. 1002.22, F.S.) and the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

If your child is served under an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan, the specific written consents you provided during that planning or evaluation process control and take precedence over any general consent settings in the Online Consent Notification System. If you disagree with the consents, services, or evaluations offered under your child's IEP or 504 Plan, please contact the school to schedule a team meeting, and see the IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 for your full rights.

Note: *A complete statement of parental rights and how to exercise them is posted on the CMCS website under Parent Dashboard, and is available from the Director of Operations upon request.*

2.3 Expressed Concern Policy

Parents sometimes need to raise a concern or question with the school. Please start with the person closest to the issue:

- First, contact your child's teacher(s).
- If the issue isn't resolved, contact the Head of School and/or Director of Operations.
- If it still isn't resolved, you may contact the CMCS Board of Directors as a last step.

A complete staff contact list is on the CMCS website. For concerns about a possible ethics violation, see the link on the Parent Dashboard to the Pasco County Schools District website.

2.4 Respect & Civility Policy

Everyone at CMCS — employees, parents, and visitors — is expected to treat each other with civility, fairness, and respect, whether in person, on the phone, in writing, or in voicemail. This includes staff, students, parents, and visitors alike.

Uncivil behavior means conduct that is physically or verbally threatening (overt or implied), coercive, intimidating, violent, or harassing — for example, profanity, personal insults, or attacks based on race, gender, nationality, religion, or sexual orientation. This policy is not meant to limit anyone's right to free expression; its purpose is to keep our school community safe, respectful, and free of disruptive or threatening behavior.

- Staff will treat students, parents, and the public with respect, and expect the same in return.
- Staff will not conduct business with individuals who use obscenities or speak in a demanding, loud, insulting, or threatening manner.
- We want CMCS to feel safe and respectful for everyone. Hostile, threatening, or aggressive behavior isn't something we can allow, and in serious situations we may need to involve law enforcement.

Please report any instance of uncivil behavior to the Head of School. A record will be kept of the incident and the response, and confidentiality will be maintained wherever possible.

2.5 Conferences

CMCS encourages every family to attend at least one Parent-Teacher-Student Conference per year; conferences can be scheduled at other times as recommended by teachers. Middle School students set up and lead one Student-Led Conference each year, with teacher guidance. Parents may also request a private conference. Conferences may be held in person or virtually — virtual conferences are encouraged for scheduling convenience.

Note: *For staff safety and to protect instructional time, teachers and school leadership will only hold conferences that have been scheduled in advance.*

2.6 Student Information Changes

Please notify the school immediately of any change to your address, phone number, emergency contact, or other important information — accurate records are essential to your child's safety. Update information both by contacting the school directly and through the myPascoConnect parent portal and ParentSquare.

CMCS follows all court-ordered custody arrangements on file and will not change how we apply them without a new, signed court order. It is the responsibility of the parent providing an updated order to give the school a copy.

2.7 Nondiscrimination & Title IX Notice

CMCS does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, religion, or genetic information in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices, and provides equal educational opportunity to all students, consistent with Title VI, Title IX, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Florida Educational Equity Act (s. 1000.05, F.S.).

Title IX Coordinator (sex discrimination and sexual harassment complaints): the Director of Operations, *Lori Spurr - 813-996-0991 - lori.spurr@cmcsmontessori.com*

Equity Manager / Anti-Harassment Compliance Officer (race, color, national origin, religion, disability, and other unlawful harassment or discrimination complaints): the Head of School, *Michael Picone - 813-996-0991 - michael.picone@cmcsmontessori.com*

A complaint alleging unlawful discrimination or harassment may be filed with either compliance officer above, orally or in writing. The full nondiscrimination policy and grievance procedure, including federal and state agencies where a complaint may also be filed, are set out in Appendix A and the Nondiscrimination & Civil Rights Notice included in this handbook.

Section 3: School Operations

3.1 Hours

Hours	Time
Office Hours	8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Student Hours	8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Before & After School Care	7:00 – 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Summer Office Hours (Mon–Thu)	9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

3.2 Visitors

All visitors must check in at the front office, present a valid photo ID, and be scanned into our Raptor visitor-management system before receiving a visitor badge, which must be worn at all times on campus. This keeps our campus secure for students and staff.

During our Montessori normalization period, the first six weeks of school, while new routines are established, we do not allow visitors in classrooms or at lunch.

3.3 Attendance

Regular attendance and punctuality are essential to student success and academic progress. Excessive absences, tardies, or early dismissals may affect a student's academic progress, promotion, or placement.

Parents/guardians are responsible for reporting all student absences through the Parent Portal and providing required documentation. Absences are excused only for reasons permitted by the Pasco County Schools Student Code of Conduct and applicable CMCS attendance procedures. All other absences are considered unexcused. The Head of School or designee will make the final determination regarding whether an absence is excused.

A parent/guardian may excuse qualifying absences for up to three (3) consecutive days, five (5) calendar days within a 30-day period, and ten (10) calendar days within a 90-day period. A medical provider's note is required beginning on the fourth consecutive day of absence and must identify the applicable date(s) of absence. Year-long medical excuses will not be accepted. Required documentation must be submitted within three (3) days of the student's return to school or the absence may be recorded as unexcused.

When a student is sent home by the school health team due to illness, the student will be excused for the following 24 hours. Continued absence beyond that period requires appropriate parent/guardian or medical documentation. If a student is absent due to a reportable communicable condition, such as pink eye, chicken pox, measles, ringworm, or COVID-19, the

parent/guardian should contact the school office promptly. Medical clearance may be required before the student returns to school.

Families should schedule appointments and travel outside of school hours and the school calendar whenever possible. Vacations during the school year are not automatically excused. To be considered an excused absence, a vacation must be approved in advance and is limited to a maximum of five (5) school days per school year. Families should notify teachers in advance of an approved absence. Teachers are not required to provide work in advance for vacation absences but will make reasonable efforts to help students address missed instruction upon their return.

Under Florida law (s. 1003.26(1)(b), F.S.), five (5) unexcused absences, or absences for which the reason is unknown, within a calendar month or ten (10) within a 90-calendar-day period may constitute a pattern of nonattendance requiring school intervention. Repeated unexcused absences, tardies, or early dismissals may result in additional attendance interventions and, when appropriate, referral to the school Social Worker, Youth and Family Alternatives, Inc. through the CINS/FINS Program, and/or further action consistent with Florida compulsory attendance requirements.

3.4 Arrival & Dismissal

3.4.1 General Rules

- Drive slowly entering and exiting the car line, follow staff directions, and watch for children.
- To keep car line moving safely for everyone, we ask parents to save phone calls and catch-up chats with staff for another time.
- Parents form two car lines upon entering campus at both arrival and dismissal.
- We use a “loading dock” system: the first six vehicles pull up to the six marked slots at Building B. Please put your car in park while your child is loaded or unloaded; once all six are clear, the next six vehicles move up.
- Please follow the traffic patrol staff member's directions.
- Car line is a phone-free zone for parents — please put your phone away once you're in line.
- Students cannot be checked out from the office between 2:45 and 3:15 p.m., since this is when the dismissal process is underway.

3.4.2 Arrival

- Morning car line runs 8:00–8:30 a.m.; students are marked tardy after 8:30.
- Please arrive as close to the start of car line as possible.
- All students go through car line, except those in Before Care.
- Have your child ready to go before you reach the drop-off zone — shoes on, materials in hand.
- Please do not drop your child off in the parking lot to walk in alone, or at the courtyard gates; parents should not enter the courtyard gates during morning arrival.

- Once car line ends at 8:30, a sign goes up across the driveway. After that, please park and walk your child to the office.

3.4.3 Dismissal

To reduce traffic congestion, please arrive within your assigned window:

Group	Pickup Window
Lower Elementary (without Upper Elementary/Middle School siblings)	3:00 – 3:15 p.m.
Upper Elementary & Middle School (including LE siblings)	3:15 – 3:30 p.m.

Arriving earlier than your window adds to backup from Ehren Cut-Off to Hwy 41, so please help us by arriving on time rather than early. Display your current school-issued car sign on your rearview mirror, with your student's name(s), for the entire time you're in car line, until your child is loaded — a staff member (the “caller”) will read names aloud and escort each student to your car. CMCS issues two car signs per student each year; extra signs are \$5.00 each on the school website.

If you don't have a car sign, please park and sign your child out in the front office with photo ID — students are not released without one. Students should wait for a staff member to help them into the car rather than opening their own doors.

3.4.4 Safety Rules

- No office checkouts between 2:45–3:15 p.m.; if you need to pick up early, please do so before 2:45 p.m.
- Bus assignment changes must reach the office before 2:45 p.m., or your child will ride the bus as usual.
- If your car arrives and your child isn't at the pickup slot yet, we'll direct you back through car line.
- Please put your phone away once you're in car line or on campus.
- Please stay in your car during car line — stepping out is a safety hazard.
- Children load and unload on the passenger side only.
- If your child isn't picked up by 3:30 p.m., they'll be escorted to After Care and the applicable fee will apply.

3.5 School Safety

CMCS follows a comprehensive safety plan covering the health, safety, and welfare of students, staff, and visitors, consistent with Florida's school-safety statutes. Under Florida law, the school safety plan itself is confidential and is not subject to public records requests.

3.6 Emergency Procedures

All staff are trained on our emergency procedures. CMCS follows Pasco County Schools' Emergency Management and Crisis Response Plans, including the Site Threat Continuum. If a school closure is needed, CMCS follows the direction of Pasco County Schools.

3.7 Weather Advisory Guidelines

CMCS follows weather guidelines covering heat, cold, and lightning. Students stay indoors when the heat index reaches 100°F or above, or when the temperature drops below 35°F.

During severe weather at dismissal (heavy rain, flooding, or lightning), expect a delay. The Head of School may enact a Severe Weather Dismissal when conditions make the usual process unsafe, and has authority over dismissal timing during storms or lightning.

3.8 Lost and Found

Please label uniform shirts, clothing, lunchboxes, and water bottles discreetly with your student's first and last name. Labeled items found on campus go back to the student's classroom. We do not keep a general lost-and-found bin, and unlabeled items may be donated or sold.

Note: *CMCS cannot take responsibility or provide reimbursement for personal clothing or property lost at school.*

3.9 Field Trips

Field trips extend our classrooms and our philosophy, and participation is a privilege. CMCS may ask for chaperones; chaperones are expected to follow all school policies and any private bus procedures. Students must have a signed Field Trip Behavior Agreement on file prior to attending any field trips.

Students need a signed permission slip for each trip. A student who doesn't attend a field trip works in another classroom or the office and should still attend school that day, or the absence may be marked unexcused. Field trip fees are non-refundable for missed or canceled trips. Students wear their official field trip shirt and uniform bottoms (khaki or navy) unless told otherwise. A parent may not pick up or sign a child out of a field trip except in circumstances specifically approved by CMCS.

3.10 Holidays, Birthdays, and Other Special Occasions

We celebrate birthdays and holidays in a Montessori style during the regular school day rather than with formal parties. Please talk with your child's teacher at least a week ahead of your child's birthday to plan a classroom celebration.

We encourage healthy options, popcorn, yogurt, ginger snaps, non-frosted muffins, or fruit, served in original store-bought packaging. Please check with your teacher first, since allergy rules vary by classroom.

If you're inviting an entire class to an outside birthday party, invitations may be distributed at school. If only some children are invited, please distribute those invitations yourself, outside of school, to avoid hurt feelings.

Section 4: Academics

4.1 Student Progression Plan

The CMCS Board of Directors has adopted the Pasco County School District's Student Progression Plan, available on the school and district websites.

Florida law (s. 1008.25, F.S.) requires every district to run a comprehensive student-progression program and to report annually to parents on each student's progress toward state and district benchmarks in English Language Arts, science, math, and social studies, including statewide assessment results. Progress is based on classroom work, observations, tests, district and state assessments, and response to intervention, and is reported to parents in writing.

CMCS uses a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Florida's framework for matching instruction and support to each student's needs, to align our efforts with district and state goals for promotion, acceleration, retention, and remediation.

Promotion decisions weigh a student's progress reports, report cards, classroom performance, daily observations, standardized tests, portfolios, a Progress Monitoring Plan (PMP) or IEP where applicable, and other objective data. The classroom teacher and School Leadership Team share primary responsibility for judging a student's readiness for the next grade level. Any retention follows Florida law and the county Student Progression Plan.

Note: *Final promotion and retention decisions rest with the Head of School.*

4.2 Report Cards & Progress Reports

Grades 1–2 Primary Report Card

- E = Excellent — consistent, exceptional performance
- S = Successful — understands the concepts or behaviors
- N = Needs Improvement — needs more practice and cannot yet work independently with the concept
- F/U = Well Below Expectations — struggling with the concept and not yet at grade level

Grades 3–8 Intermediate & Middle School Report Card

- A = 90–100 B = 80–89 C = 70–79 D = 60–69 F/U = 59 and below

Grading Weight by Grade Band

Grade Band	Daily Classwork	Assessments
Lower Elementary (Grades 1–3)	70%	30%
Upper Elementary (Grades 4–5)	60%	40%
Middle School (Grades 6–8)*	40%	60%

Note: **End-of-Course (EOC) exams count for 30% of a student's grade in that subject.*

Progress Reports post mid-quarter and report cards post quarterly on myStudent; we do not send home paper copies. Parents of students in Grades 6–8 can monitor grades in myStudent, though grades may lag a bit while teachers finish scoring and entering work.

4.3 Class Placement

Our staff work to place each child where they're most likely to succeed. Parent input is welcome in writing and is considered, though CMCS does not accept requests for a specific teacher or class, and placement decisions cannot be guaranteed. The Leadership Team balances many factors across classrooms, and the Head of School makes final placement decisions.

CMCS reserves the right to decline a student's enrollment in an online course (such as FLVS or Pasco eSchool) that is already offered on campus during that period in the student's schedule.

4.4 Middle School Courses & Placement

Course placement considers standardized and classroom assessments, teacher recommendation, student portfolio, and observation, with final decisions made by the Head of School.

Florida law requires middle schoolers to pass Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies each year (grades 6–8) to be promoted to high school, earning a grade of “D” or higher; students who don't pass retake the course through Course Recovery. Students must also complete one semester of Career & Technical Education Planning by the end of 8th grade.

Intensive Reading and/or Intensive Math is strongly recommended for students scoring a Level 1 or 2 on the FSA English Language Arts and/or Math assessment. Students enrolled in Intensive Reading and/or Math may be required to give up one elective (such as Critical Thinking/Research, PE/Art/Music, or Spanish), at CMCS's discretion based on the student's most recent assessment data and in consultation with the family and, where applicable, the student's IEP or 504 team. Middle School students receiving tiered intervention will be placed in a Critical Thinking course and will not be able to take Spanish 1 or Spanish 2 for high school credit. Some elective courses, such as Spanish 2, will have prerequisites (successful completion of Spanish 1) or teacher recommendation for enrollment.

Any change to a student's elective schedule that results from a documented IEP or Section 504 Plan goal is made by that student's IEP or 504 team, not by blanket policy, and is recorded in the plan itself.

For students not on an IEP or 504 Plan, elective adjustments related to Intensive Reading or Intensive Math placement are based on the individual student's most recent assessment data and are reviewed with the family before the change takes effect, so every family understands the reasoning and can ask questions.

4.5 Homework

Your child's teacher will explain their classroom's homework approach. If your child is spending noticeably more time than the recommended amount, please discuss with your child's teachers.

4.6 Student Services

Students are assessed academically, behaviorally, and emotionally throughout the year; direct questions about Student Services to our Director of Operations.

CMCS provides services required by district, state, and federal law, including Exceptional Student Education (ESE), Section 504, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL, described below). If a student isn't meeting standards in reading, writing, or math, we develop a Progress Monitoring Plan (PMP) with the family; a similar plan may address behavioral needs. Written requests for an assessment or evaluation go to the Director of Operations.

4.6.1 Exceptional Student Education (ESE)

Acceptance of Students: CMCS admits all students based on space availability through our lottery; ESE status has no bearing on lottery selection. Because CMCS is part of the larger school district for special-education purposes, the district serves as the Local Education Agency (LEA: the entity legally responsible for special-education services under the federal IDEA law), and CMCS staff follow district ESE policies and sometimes act on the district's behalf in meetings. Since IDEA does not require every service to be available at every school, some ESE services may be delivered at another location based on student need and the district's service-delivery model, as determined by the student's IEP team, including the parent.

Limitation of Services: CMCS works to individualize instruction for every student and retains an ESE teacher to support students with special needs. When a family with a child on an IEP is considering CMCS, we'll share the services and staffing levels currently available. The IEP team ultimately decides the most appropriate placement within the district's broader service model. If an accepted student's IEP calls for services well beyond what CMCS currently offers, we will convene an IEP meeting with district staff to plan how those needs will be met.

4.6.2 Section 504

CMCS provides a free, appropriate public education to any student who has a disability under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, regardless of its nature or severity.

A 504 Plan is considered when our School-Based Leadership Team believes a child may have a qualifying disability — whether flagged by a teacher, requested by a parent, or supported by a medical report. Eligibility is determined using the sponsoring district's criteria.

Note: *If you disagree with an eligibility decision or would like information on mediation or a due-process complaint, ask the Director of Operations for the district's Procedural Safeguards Notice.*

4.6.3 Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS)

MTSS organizes instruction and support in tiers of increasing intensity based on how a student responds — sometimes called RTI (Response to Intervention) when referring to that response specifically. It is not a program or a class, but a way of matching support to need, catching struggles early, and helping identify students who may need special-education evaluation. Its key pieces are high-quality core instruction, universal screening, tiered intervention matched to need, and ongoing progress monitoring.

4.6.4 English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

CMCS identifies and supports students whose home language isn't English. When a student enrolls, the Director of Operations confirms a Home Language Survey is on file, or ensures the family completes one within the first two weeks. CMCS follows the sponsoring district's ESOL policies, consistent with Florida law and the LULAC et al. Consent Decree; where CMCS and district policy differ, district policy governs.

4.7 Screening & Testing

Students in Grades 1–8 take Florida's standardized assessments, plus other diagnostic testing through the year to track progress. Students may also have sensory screenings (hearing, vision, BMI, scoliosis) as required by Pasco County Schools, with parental consent requested for each. Written requests for assessment or evaluation go to the Director of Operations.

4.8 Tutoring

If a student needs extra help, private tutoring is always an option. Tutoring arranged with a CMCS staff member is a private agreement between that teacher and the family — it is not a CMCS-sponsored program, and CMCS isn't responsible for it. Teachers may not tutor their own students in a subject they grade.

4.9 Child Abuse, Exploitation & Human Trafficking Prevention Instruction

Florida law (s. 1003.42(2)(o)1.g., F.S.) requires that every K–12 student receive age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate instruction on the **prevention of child sexual abuse, exploitation, and human trafficking**, delivered as part of comprehensive health education. CMCS provides this instruction using the **Safer, Smarter Schools** curriculum, consistent with the program adopted by Pasco County Schools.

Lessons are grade-appropriate and age-appropriate, and focus on body safety, recognizing unsafe or uncomfortable situations, and identifying a trusted adult to tell. Instruction is delivered by trained CMCS instructional staff according to the district's implementation plan.

Consistent with the Parents' Bill of Rights (Section 2.2), parents may review the instructional materials used for this curriculum. Contact the Director of Operations, or see Pasco County Schools' implementation plan posted on the district website, for delivery methods by grade level, instructor qualifications, and a description of the materials used.

Section 5: Policies & Procedures

5.1 Student Code of Conduct

The CMCS Board of Directors has adopted the Pasco County School District's Student Code of Conduct (SCOC). It applies during the school day, on school transportation, and at all school functions on or off campus, and to off-campus student conduct that substantially disrupts the school environment or threatens the safety of a student or staff member. We all share responsibility for student safety. Please report any threat of harm to school staff immediately. The school protects the confidentiality of everyone involved to the extent the law allows.

5.2 School Dress Code Policy

To support an orderly, safe learning environment, all students wear school uniforms Monday through Friday, ordered through Lands' End and/or Cheer It On Sports, our only approved uniform suppliers; no other vendor may embroider CMCS logos or names. Details are on our website under Parent Dashboard → Dress Code.

Students who arrive out of uniform may be sent to the office and a notice sent home; students may borrow from donated uniforms, or a parent may be asked to bring an appropriate uniform. Students may be sent home for clothing that is not appropriate for school. Sending a student home is always a last resort, used only after a loaner uniform or parent drop-off isn't possible. Dress code decisions are at CMCS staff's discretion. On Fridays, students must wear uniform bottoms with a CMCS uniform top or CMCS spirit shirt. Free dress days will be announced.

5.3 Discipline Policy

CMCS uses Positive Discipline alongside our Montessori philosophy to understand a child's social-emotional growth and shape how we respond to behavior. Behavior becomes a concern when it disrupts the school environment or conflicts with CMCS's values; when that happens, staff use a Tiered Response — escalating levels of intervention matched to the behavior's severity and frequency.

Our Discipline Policy works alongside the Pasco County School Board's Student Code of Conduct, available at the school office and on both the school's and district's websites.

Teachers and staff document any behavior requiring discipline on an Incident Report. For a student with a documented behavioral goal in an IEP or 504 Plan, discipline follows that plan, including a review (called a manifestation determination) of whether the behavior was connected to the student's disability before any change in placement, consistent with IDEA and Section 504.

Note: *A general summary of suspension and expulsion procedures, and parents' notice rights in that process, is available on our website in the Pasco County Schools Code of Conduct referenced above. CMCS does not use corporal punishment.*

5.4 Bullying

CMCS does not tolerate bullying or harassment of any kind, consistent with Florida's Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act (s. 1006.147, F.S.). Bullying means repeated, unwanted verbal, written, or physical conduct, including cyberbullying, severe enough to create a hostile environment or interfere with a student's ability to participate at school.

To report bullying: any student, parent, or staff member can report an incident, orally or in writing, to a teacher, the Head of School, or the Director of Operations. Reports can also be made anonymously through FortifyFL (Section 5.10). We investigate reports promptly, and retaliation against anyone who reports in good faith is strictly prohibited. The complete policy, including the District's discipline matrix and appeal process, is on the CMCS website and available from the front office.

5.5 Teen Dating Violence

Consistent with s. 1006.148, F.S., CMCS strictly prohibits dating violence or abuse by one student against another on school property, during a school-sponsored activity, or on school transportation. Report suspected teen dating violence directly to the Director of Operations.

5.6 Prohibition of Firearms and Weapons

Firearms and weapons pose a serious risk to our students, staff, and community, so possession on school premises is prohibited at all times, except for law enforcement, School Safety Guards, or other legally authorized exceptions. Unauthorized possession may be a crime under Florida law (Chapter 790, F.S.) and will be reported to law enforcement. "School premises" includes all buildings, grounds, vehicles, and parking areas, and this prohibition extends to any school activity regardless of location.

5.7 Smoke-Free Campus

Consistent with the Florida Clean Indoor Air Act, no one may possess a lit cigarette, pipe, cigar, vape, or other lit tobacco product anywhere on school grounds or within 100 feet of any building, and no smoking areas are designated within that buffer.

5.8 Participation in After-School Enrichment & Activities

Students are encouraged to take part in CMCS's programs and activities under the guidelines we set for participation. A student joining an after-school activity, club, or group is expected to participate actively and follow its rules.

Note: *A student absent from school that day may not participate in after-school activities, including Enrichment Programs, special events, and dances, that same day.*

Students who don't follow the applicable rules may lose the privilege of participating.

5.9 Mandatory Reporting of Abuse or Neglect

Florida law (s. 39.201, F.S.) requires any CMCS teacher, administrator, or other school employee who knows or suspects a child is a victim of abuse, abandonment, or neglect to report that immediately to the Florida Department of Children and Families Central Abuse Hotline at 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873). This duty applies whether or not the suspected conduct happened at school.

5.10 FortifyFL

CMCS participates in FortifyFL, Florida's statewide school-safety reporting tool. Students, parents, and community members can use the free FortifyFL app or website (FortifyFL.com) to report a safety concern, bullying, or a potential threat (anonymously if they choose) directly to school administrators and law enforcement.

Section 6: Health & Wellness

6.1 Sick Policy

Log any absence for illness on our website under Report an Absence. Please keep your child home if they have:

- A fever over 100°F — wait until fever-free for 24 hours without fever-reducing medication.
- Vomiting or diarrhea — wait until symptom-free for 24 hours without medication.
- Conjunctivitis (“pink eye”) — a red, burning eye with yellow discharge; quite contagious.
- An unidentified or undiagnosed rash — a doctor’s note confirming it isn’t contagious is needed to return.
- Impetigo, a common and highly contagious skin infection.
- Any other contagious illness.

If a doctor starts your child on an antibiotic, please keep them home for at least the first 24 hours of treatment. If a child becomes ill at school, we’ll call a parent, guardian, or emergency contact for pickup, since we’re not able to provide recovery care or give medication without written authorization. CMCS follows all current district COVID-19 protocols.

6.2 Lice

Students identified as having live head lice do not need to be sent home early from school; they can return to classroom activity avoiding head-to-head contact, go home at the end of the day, be treated, and return to class after appropriate treatment has begun.

6.3 Immunizations

Any child entering school for the first time, entering first or seventh grade, or transferring from out of state must meet Florida’s Compulsory Immunization Law (s. 1003.22, Florida Statutes). A certificate of immunization from a physician or the County Health Department must be presented before a child is admitted. The County Health Department may issue a religious exemption Form DH 681 if you, as a parent/guardian, or your student have a religious tenet or practice that prohibits your student from receiving the required immunizations.

6.4 Medication

Only prescribed medication is accepted at school, hand-delivered by a parent or guardian to the Clinic Assistant, with a completed authorization form and a doctor’s note or prescription on file. A student may self-carry an inhaler, epi-pen, or pancreatic enzyme supplement only if authorized by their healthcare provider and the proper form is completed — otherwise, students may not carry any medication.

Medicine must arrive in its original prescription container and is dispensed only as prescribed. Over-the-counter items, including ointments, need written physician authorization to be used at

school. Ask the Clinic Assistant for the required forms or access them on our website under Parent Dashboard → Health Info.

6.5 Sunscreen Protocol

Sunscreens are best applied at home by the parent/guardian, before the student comes to school. The student can also apply the sunscreen if they are able in the school setting. If sunscreen is to be administered by school personnel, the parent/guardian must provide the sunscreen, and the parent/guardian must sign a “parent permission” form; however, a physician’s note or prescription is not required. Additionally, school district personnel must place administration of sunscreen on the Medication Administration Record.

Sunglasses and hats may also be worn during outdoor activities, including PE and recess. They are not to be worn inside the buildings/classrooms.

6.5 Clinic & Accidents

Our clinic can wash a minor injury with soap and water, apply a non-medicated bandage, or apply calamine lotion for bites. If your child becomes ill, we’ll do everything we can to reach a parent, guardian, or emergency contact. Please keep your emergency information current, since students are released only to people listed there unless a parent notifies us otherwise. Staff complete an Incident Report when appropriate, for the parent to sign and return.

6.6 Lunches & Snacks

We ask families to pack wholesome food. Hot lunch is available daily through our vendor; qualifying families may apply for Free and Reduced Lunch (forms under Parent Dashboard → School Meals). Families may also pack lunch from home — please label containers clearly, and note that microwaved items must heat safely in 30 seconds or less.

Every student brings a placemat, utensils, a napkin, and a water bottle daily. Water bottles should contain only water — no soda, coffee, energy drinks, flavored water, or other sugary drinks; milk and fruit juice are fine to bring for lunch. If lunch is forgotten, we’ll try to reach a parent; if CMCS provides lunch, you’ll be billed.

6.7 Mental Health Services

CMCS offers a multi-tiered system of mental health services. Under s. 1012.584, F.S., all CMCS staff complete annual mental health awareness and assistance training. Direct questions about available services to the Director of Operations.

6.8 Wellness Plan

Our full Wellness Plan is posted on the website under Quick Links → Wellness Plan.

Section 7: Family Engagement

7.1 Family Engagement

CMCS follows Pasco County Schools' policies for visitors and volunteers. Our Board has approved a visitor/volunteer/vendor chart (on our website) tailored to our events and family-engagement opportunities, with any role involving direct student supervision designated as a volunteer or vendor activity.

Family involvement matters to student and school success, so CMCS requires 15 service hours per family each year, which can be earned through either visitor or volunteer activities. All volunteers complete an orientation before working directly with students or chaperoning field trips.

For chaperone roles, please complete fingerprinting and applications early — those who have done so are eligible for the field-trip chaperone lottery. If you qualify for free or reduced lunch and need help with the cost of this process, contact the Head of School.

Like all visitors, volunteers and vendors present valid ID to be scanned into Raptor, even after completing a Level 2 background check.

Service hours are tracked through ParentSquare and tracked by the school; recording your hours is your responsibility. If completing your service hours becomes difficult due to work schedule, health, distance, disability, or financial hardship, contact the Head of School to discuss alternative arrangements; hours may not be satisfied through a monetary payment. Not completing the required 15 hours without an agreed alternative in place could affect your child's enrollment eligibility for the next school year, and families will receive written notice before any such decision is made.

Note: *When volunteering at school, please don't bring siblings or other children with you.*

7.2 Fundraising Efforts

As an independent charter school, CMCS relies on family fundraising to help fund our Montessori program, so we ask every family to participate — including meetings, preparation, and events. Our two major fundraisers are the Cougar Commitment and the Annual Auction and Gala (including Chance to Win), alongside smaller fundraisers for student-led organizations throughout the year.

7.3 Family Involvement

We offer both formal and informal ways to get involved:

- CMCS Community Connection — regular meetings that build home-school communication and connect families with one another
- Parent Education Nights — covering Montessori education, child development, current events, and CMCS life
- Family Socials at local restaurants

Section 8: Technology Information

8.1 School-Issued iPads, Computers, & Electronic Devices

Technology extends our Montessori materials, and we teach responsible digital citizenship alongside it. Lower Elementary classrooms share a class set of iPads. Students in Grades 4–8 are issued a personal iPad for use at school only — it's stored in a charging cart overnight and does not go home.

All students sign a Responsible Electronic Use Rules for Students Technology User Agreement. A tech violation is any breach of this handbook, the iPad agreement, or classroom technology rules — including disrespect toward the device, the learning environment, themselves, or others — and may result in loss of technology privileges.

We welcome the thoughtful use of AI tools to enhance learning, but academic integrity comes first: students need prior teacher approval for any AI-assisted activity, and all AI-assisted work is subject to review.

Note: *Final disciplinary decisions rest with the Head of School. Teachers will provide alternate materials for a student whose technology privileges are temporarily restricted.*

8.2 Personal Electronic Devices & Cell Phones

Under Florida law (s. 1006.07, F.S.), students in Grades 1–8 may not use a personal electronic device — including cell phones, smart watches, tablets, headphones or earbuds, and gaming devices — at any time during the school day, from the first bell to the last bell (“bell-to-bell”). This is a statewide requirement, not a CMCS preference, and it covers the entire school day, including lunch and recess.

Devices must be powered off or silenced and stored out of sight — for example, in a backpack — from arrival until dismissal. Teachers cannot authorize use during the school day outside the exceptions below.

- A device required under a student's IEP, Section 504 Plan, or an on-file health care plan; or
- A device CMCS staff expressly authorizes for a specific school-sponsored activity, such as a field trip, performance, or overnight stay.

Note: *CMCS cannot take responsibility or provide reimbursement for personal electronic devices or property brought to school or a school event.*

Not following this policy may lead to discipline and temporary confiscation of the device. Students may not have a device in their possession during state testing, or their results could be invalidated.

Section 9: Business Operations

9.1 Student Fees

As is customary across Pasco County schools, CMCS asks for annual fees that help cover consumable classroom, specials, technology, and science materials. Montessori materials can be costly in small quantities, so as a convenience, all student supplies may be purchased through our EduKit program, delivered to the classroom for the first day of school. The fee schedule and payment options are in the registration packet.

CMCS's fee schedule mirrors the fees normally charged by other Pasco County public schools, consistent with Florida law. No student will be denied instructional materials, technology, participation, or promotion because a family is unable to pay a school fee. Families who need a fee waiver or a payment plan should contact the Head of School. All requests are handled confidentially.

9.2 Cashless School

CMCS offers digital payment for all school expenses, since cash payments take substantial office time to process. Please use our digital platforms where possible; if cash is necessary, hand-deliver it to the office — please don't send cash to the classroom or hand it to a teacher.

9.3 Returned Check Fee

CMCS charges a \$30 fee for any returned check. Please pay the amount plus fee, in cash or money order, within two weeks of notice. CMCS may decline check payments from families with a history of returned checks.

9.4 Refunds

Refunds are occasionally available for prior collections with Head of School approval. Field trip fees are not refunded for missed or canceled trips.

9.5 Technology Fees

Every student is charged a grade-based Technology Fee. If a Grades 4–8 iPad (which stays at school rather than going home daily) is lost, broken, or destroyed, replacement or repair fees apply, and these fees accumulate over a student's enrollment in Grades 4–8. Families who are unable to pay a Technology Fee or iPad repair/replacement fee should contact the Head of School to discuss a payment plan or fee waiver.

Section 10: Before & After Care Programs

10.1 General

Please refer to the Before & After Care Manual found on our website.

10.1.1 Hours of Operation

Before Care runs 7:00–8:00 a.m.; After Care runs from the end of car line (3:30 p.m.) until 6:00 p.m.

Note: *Parents must escort their child into and out of the Extended Care classroom so staff can sign them in and out.*

10.1.2 Fees

Fees are charged daily and posted on our website. A per-minute late fee applies after 6:00 p.m.; repeated late pickups are handled by School Leadership and may result in losing access to the program. All fees must stay current — a balance more than two weeks past due suspends access to Before and After Care.

10.1.3 Emergency Closings & Delays

If school is delayed, released early, or canceled for weather or an emergency, Before and After Care are canceled too. If severe weather develops after After Care has started, please arrange pickup as soon as you can.

10.1.4 Registration

Registration, including a non-refundable fee, must be completed before a student starts Before or After Care. Both programs, and after-school enrichment activities, are only for students registered for that specific program.

10.2 Student Expectations

10.2.1 Student Rules

Students in Before and/or After Care follow the same rules as the rest of the handbook. Please note: no cell phones or electronic games in our Extended Care programs.

10.2.2 Consequences for Misbehavior

Students who don't follow the rules receive appropriate consequences. If behavior doesn't improve, parents receive written notice that continued issues could end the student's access to Before/After Care. The Head of School may also apply the school's broader discipline policy described in Section 5.

10.3 Staffing

Before and After Care always maintain the legally required staff-to-student ratio, and all children are supervised at all times. The same supervision, safety, and accountability procedures that apply during the school day continue through Before and After Care.

Section 11: Appendix

Appendix A: Nondiscrimination & Civil Rights Notice

Required notice under Title VI, Title IX, Section 504, the ADA, and the Florida Educational Equity Act (s. 1000.05, F.S.)

Policy Statement

Countryside Montessori Charter School (CMCS) does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, religion, or genetic information in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices, and provides equal educational opportunity to all students. This policy is set out in full in the CMCS Board Policies (Appendix A of the Student/Parent Handbook and the CMCS Board Policy Manual, available on the CMCS website).

Compliance Officers

Role	Responsibility	Contact
Title IX Coordinator	Sex discrimination and sexual harassment complaints (Title IX)	Director of Operations <i>Lori Spurr - 813-996-0991 - lori.spurr@cmcsmontessori.com</i>
Equity Manager / Anti-Harassment Compliance Officer	Race, color, national origin, religion, disability, and other unlawful harassment or discrimination complaints (Titles VI & VII, s. 1000.05, F.S.)	Head of School <i>Michael Picone - 813-996-0991 - michael.picone@cmcsmontessori.com</i>
Section 504 Coordinator	Disability accommodation and Section 504 eligibility questions	ESE Teacher <i>Marina Ross - 813-996-0991 - marina.ross@cmcsmontessori.com</i>

A complaint alleging unlawful discrimination or harassment may be filed with the appropriate compliance officer above, orally or in writing. The full complaint and grievance procedure is set out in Appendix A of this handbook and the CMCS Board Policy Manual.

Federal & State Agencies

A complaint may also be filed directly with:

U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights — Atlanta Office 61 Forsyth Street SW, Suite 19-T-70 Atlanta, GA 30303 Phone: 404-974-9406 • TDD: 404-562-6454 Fax: 404-562-6455 Email: OCR.Atlanta@ed.gov Web: ocras.ed.gov (file online)	Florida Commission on Human Relations 4075 Esplanade Way, Unit 110 Tallahassee, FL 32399 Phone: 850-488-7082 TDD: 800-342-8170 • Fax: 850-488-5291 Email: fchrinfo@fchr.myflorida.com Web: fchr.myflorida.com
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