

Nature's Way Montessori School Handbook 2026-2027

Adolescent Community Supplement

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Welcome to the Nature's Way Adolescent Community!

This document is a supplement to the Nature's Way Montessori School Handbook (2026-2027) that provides information on unique aspects of the Adolescent Community. It is important to read both this supplement and the school handbook thoroughly. Our procedures have developed over the years to allow us to work together to provide a safe and supportive environment for our adolescent students. We value feedback from families - please reach out if you have questions about our handbook.

Diversity Statement

Montessori philosophy seeks to achieve peace and equity through education. In accordance with this goal, Nature's Way Montessori School provides a safe, supportive, and developmentally appropriate environment where we can learn together. We honor the value of a diverse community and welcome conversations that aid in understanding our humanity and the world we share. We understand diversity to be valuable and nurture awareness by welcoming people of differing races, ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, abilities, personalities, languages, socio-economic backgrounds, sexualities, gender identities and expressions, political beliefs, religions, and family structures.

Program Overview

"The school should become the place where the child may live in freedom, and this freedom must not be solely the intimate, spiritual liberty of internal growth. The entire organism of the child, from his physiological, vegetative part to his motor activity, ought to find in school the best conditions for development."

– Dr. Maria Montessori

The Adolescent Community staff is committed to Dr. Montessori's ideal of ensuring that the adolescent's needs and tendencies are satisfied appropriately through meaningful work. Whether through microeconomic activities, service in the community, or lessons in the classroom, the prepared environment of the Adolescent Community strives to facilitate adolescents' self-construction and formation of the personality while preparing them for entry into adult life and society.

As described in Dr. Montessori's book *From Childhood to Adolescence*, the "Plan of Study and Work" is both an overview of the program as well as an exploration of the kinds of work required by the adolescent.

There are also descriptions of policy and procedures critical to the overall function of the school, sample forms, and other information.

Mission Statement of the Adolescent Community

“There are two needs of the adolescent: for protection during the time of the difficult physical transition, and for an understanding of the society which he is about to enter to play his part as a human...”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Keeping this in mind, it is our mission to support the natural development of our adolescent students while providing them with a safe environment in which they can explore means of social and economic independence. We do this by using the land as a point of departure for community engagement, experiences of production and exchange, self-expression, cognitive formation, and preparation for adult life.

Vision of the Adolescent Community

Nature’s Way Montessori School will provide a rich environment rooted in the work of Maria Montessori, where our students can develop to their full potential and prepare to enter adult life. We strive to assist the development of the adolescent with the following:

- Supporting the natural human development of the adolescent
- Connecting the adolescent to the land through scientific and historic studies
- Providing opportunities to explore a variety of social and economic roles
- Engaging both the head and the hands in purposeful activity
- Stimulating valorization through meaningful work
- Assisting the adolescent to become independent
- Promoting the moral development of the adolescent
- Encouraging self-expression and critical thinking skills
- Fostering a lifelong love of learning
- Learning what it means to make a contribution

- Understanding interdependency with the rest of the world
- Adapting to a variety of work demands for the sake of others; the beginning of social consciousness
- Understanding work as a product of commerce necessary to community life and leading to a beginning view of economic independence and interdependence
- Learning the meaning of rules and their importance to harmonious living
- Learning to live in domestic relations with others; to work through human problems

from David J. Kahn (in part)—The Hershey Montessori Farm School

Land Partnership at Murphy Springs Farm

“Work in the country [has] wide social connotations of productiveness and earning power. The observation of nature has not only a side that is philosophical and scientific, it has also a side of social experiences that leads on to the observations of civilization and the life of men.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Nature’s Way Montessori School is excited to continue developing the “farm” component of our Plan of Study and Work. Thanks to the generosity of Kevin Murphy of Murphy Springs Farm, the school has been in a land partnership since 2014 for educational and agricultural work.

On the Nature’s Way Farm, students will use the space as a “limitless field for scientific and historic studies” as described by Maria Montessori. This includes the cultivation of crops for sale to the community for the microeconomy and for use in Science Occupations and Humanities classes. Students also use the farm as a learning environment for science topics, such as energy, genetics, and soil chemistry.

In addition to Murphy Springs Farm, the Southland Realty Group has given permission for the school to access its property, adjacent to the northern side of the nature preserve. White’s Creek runs through this land, which also contains sinkholes, small caves, and other forms of Karst topography. Students have used this space for a number of Science Occupations classes.

Adolescent Community Plan of Study and Work

“This means there is an opportunity to learn both academically and through actual experience what are the elements of social life.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Mathematics

“Mathematics are necessary because intelligence today is no longer natural but mathematical, and without development and education in mathematics it is impossible to understand or take any part in the special forms of progress characteristic of our times.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori observed that mathematical thinking is a gift to humans at birth, as all humans possess mathematical minds. Early adolescents are developing their sense of self and their place in the world. Our mathematics program provides a safe environment for students to accomplish these endeavors through nurturing confidence, giving opportunities to explore and apply concepts deeply, and developing a problem-solving style.

The mathematics program incorporates the theoretical and applied study of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and measurement and is designed to meet the standards expected for this age by the state while preserving the applied, hands-on approach a Montessori student is accustomed to. Students explore the relationships between abstract concepts and may apply them specifically in math projects. Additionally, students apply mathematics knowledge during other academic classes and the microeconomy.

The Montessori mathematics methodology includes:

- the option for mathematics projects that explore math through topics of interest to the students
- activity- and discovery-based learning
- the history of ideas
- the use of hands-on materials
- individually paced and individually designed work and lessons
- math seminars aimed at developing math communication and problem-solving skills

The Adolescent Community utilizes the mathematics curriculum from the Math Institute, designed by a Montessori math teacher for adolescents. It allows students to work at their own pace, practicing new concepts and reinforcing previous knowledge before moving on to further concepts. Students have the opportunity to move through up to 3 levels of Integrated Math as they are ready, though most students will move through Level 2. When needed,

assistance or extension activities are provided during individual or small-group workshops or tutorials.

Science Occupations

Science Occupations are project-based science classes in which students learn scientific concepts through the lens of a problem or issue that affects our school, community, or region. Emphasis is placed on the application of adult-like scientific practice in a variety of occupations in order to make an authentic and meaningful contribution.

Students at Nature's Way have the opportunity to learn about core concept areas and have the opportunity to delve deeper into a related topic of interest to them. The courses also emphasize interdisciplinary skills that will be valuable in later educational settings such as note taking, conducting scientific experiments, working in teams, and scientific writing.

Science Occupations occur in four cycles. The course offerings incorporate several disciplines, such as studying chemistry through the soil, or genetics through the garden. Each cycle of study has a life, earth, or physical science as the core emphasis. Students at Nature's Way will take four (4) life sciences, one (1) earth science, and three (3) physical sciences as shown in the table below. This structure also acknowledges the curricular requirements suggested by the Tennessee Department of Education.

Academic Year	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
A	Cell Biology (L)	Energy (P)	Chemistry (P)	Water (L)
B	Genetics and Reproduction (L)	Earth Studies (E)	Physics (P)	Sustainability (L)

Please note that academic years A and B will alternate.

Humanities

“The study of the history of mankind...should be treated as far as possible as a complete whole, from which special periods can be chosen for individual study.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

The Adolescent Community's Humanities curriculum spans the whole of human history each year. It tells the story of what it means to be human both thematically and chronologically, incorporating history, geography, literature, art, music, philosophy, and more. As students examine the creation of human culture throughout time, they are able to think critically about the past and work toward constructing their own selves for the future. Montessori concepts drive the curriculum and scope, as each study addresses the following key themes:

- History as a scholarly pursuit
- Self-expression through music, drama, and art
- Nature vs. supranature (humanity's alteration of the natural world for its benefit)
- Elements of production and exchange
- Discoveries, inventions, and explorations
- Migrations and invasions

The class also acknowledges Tennessee state social studies standards and addresses world and United States history accordingly. The Humanities curriculum is organized into four primary themes. Students receive key lessons on a given topic before engaging in individualized work. These themes are consistent for both academic years, with one year focusing on U.S history and the alternating year focusing on world history. For each theme, one or two topics may be available for any given cycle each year. These offerings are subject to change due to the needs and interests of the community.

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
Early Agriculture	Classical Civilizations	Societies in Transition	Issues in Modern Life

Early Agriculture can include Egypt, Mesopotamia, Native Americans, the Maya, Indus Valley

Classical Civilizations can include the Aztec, the Inca, US Nationhood, Classical China, Classical Japan, Classical Rome, etc.

Societies in Transition can include U.S. Westward Expansion, the Middle Ages, Exploration and Colonization, U.S. Civil War, World War II, the Cold War, and World Religions

Issues in Modern Life can include the Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Era, climate change, immigration, global food and water issues, contemporary women's issues, and sustainability

Language Arts

"Actual writing is an external manifestation of an inner impulse. It is a pleasure that comes from carrying out a higher activity and not simply an exercise."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

In our Language Arts class, students learn fundamental concepts pertaining to the study of language, such as mechanics of writing and speech, composition, grammar, vocabulary, and more. Students explore literature in book groups and refine literary analysis techniques together, as well as partaking in independent reading throughout the year. Additionally, the class allows students to collaborate on projects related to current studies and share them with each other, while also exploring various modes of writing and researching.

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
7th Grade	Rhetoric in Folklore	Rhetoric in Poetry	Rhetoric in Drama	Rhetoric in Southern Literature
8th Grade	Rhetoric	Poetry	Socio-linguistics	Creative Writing

Spanish

"In the past one language was enough, but today it is a social convention that education should include the ability to read and write correctly in several languages."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

All Nature's Way students engage in the study of Spanish, with the Adolescent Community working towards a practical use of the language. The theme-based class involves both group activities and individual work focusing on interpersonal, interpretive and presentational communication skills. Vocabulary and grammar topics are incorporated throughout. Students also examine themes covered in other classes through the lens of the Hispanic world, gaining a broader perspective of the people

who speak the language they are learning. In addition to fostering communicative competence, emphasis is placed on cultural understanding through the use of authentic texts, music and artifacts.

Mini-Cycle

During the Mini-Cycle, students complete a research project based on the topic of their choice. These projects are designed to match the skills, abilities, and interests of each student. There is an opportunity to do intermediate or advanced level projects.

Students work with their advisors and families to narrow down ideas and to pick a topic that is academically and developmentally appropriate. Each student is then responsible for conducting research, writing a research paper, and preparing visual aids to accompany their project. During the last week of the Mini-Cycle, students share what they have learned by presenting their research to the class. Families are invited and encouraged to attend the presentations.

Self-Expression Classes

The self-expression classes nurture the adolescent's tendency toward creative work and provide activity and variety in the weekly schedule. The classes run for approximately ten weeks in three sessions: one in fall, winter, and spring. Options include art, crafts, theater, music, physical education, writing, debate, and more. Students have the opportunity to choose self-expression classes based on their individual interests. Each class offered falls into one of the following categories: Musical, Physical, Creative, or Life Skills. Although students may express a preference for a specific class, they must take at least one class in each category over the course of their time in the AC.

Workshops

Workshops are a time for committee meetings, managerial work, class-related workshop intensives, specific instruction on particular topics, and microeconomy tasks. This work is a critical component of the curriculum and offers essential opportunities for community growth and individual contributions. Students are also able to plan and lead workshop sessions.

Committees

Students and adults form committees on an as-needed basis throughout the year to meet needs in the

community. Committees may work on AC guidelines, plan for an upcoming event, coordinate service outings, or accomplish some task for the school or greater Knoxville community.

Literature Seminar

Seminar is a chance for members of a group to share questions and insights about a text, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of each other and the content. Students learn the proper procedures for active listening, building upon and appreciating others' ideas, and sharing ideas in a group setting. Formal seminar discussions occur as literature circles and are also scheduled on occasion in other academic classes.

Community Work and Care of the Environment

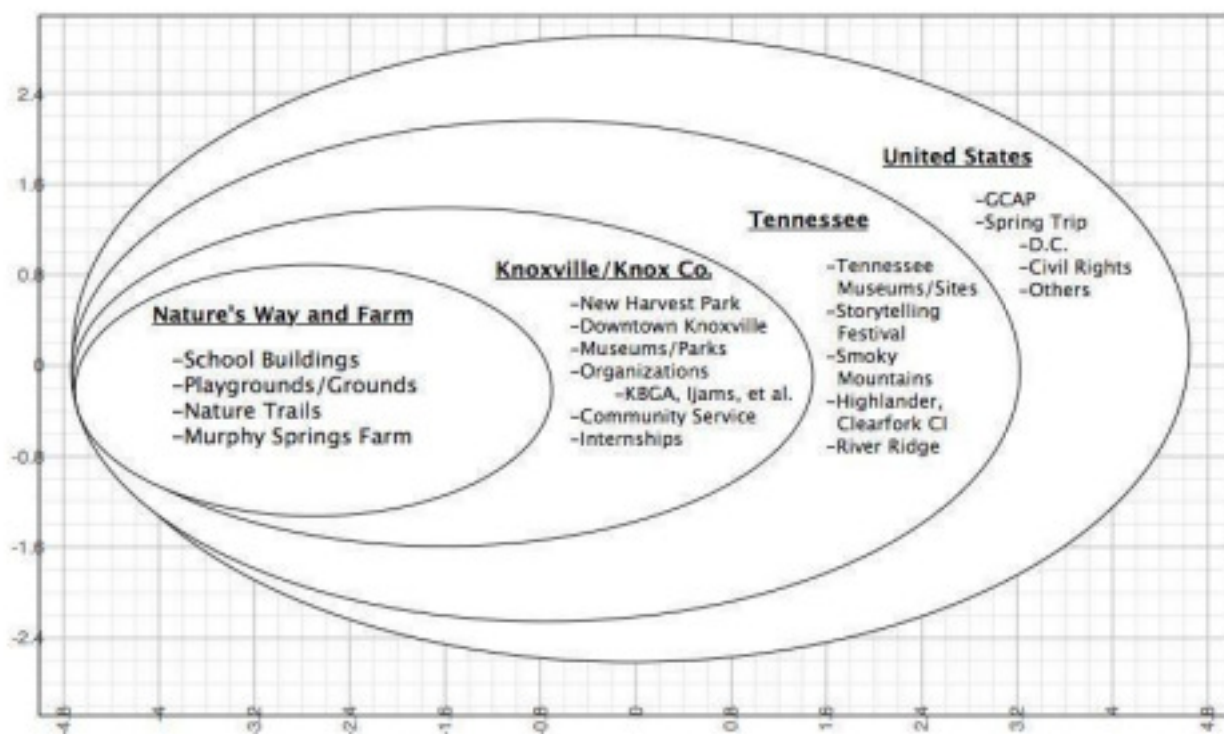
Adolescents have a developmental need to experience real, meaningful work in a wider social context. This involves both work of the head and the hand. Because of this need, manual work is an integral part of the Adolescent Community experience. Students learn directly that their contributions are essential to the successful functioning of the community.

While there is important work that needs to be addressed daily, time is also set aside for “Community Work” in order to take on larger projects. These initiatives are wide-ranging and include such things as building projects, canning vegetables, clearing trails, cleaning out the chicken coop, planting, cultivating, harvesting, making crafts, writing newsletter articles, baking, and more. Each afternoon all students contribute to the restoration of the environment, which is necessary for keeping the classroom spaces clean and orderly. The students rotate through different jobs in all spaces throughout the year. Guides assist and encourage these jobs to be done with care and attention to detail.

Community Service

Adolescents are involved in community service at Nature's Way and beyond. At school, students participate in a weekly community service program where they contribute to other classrooms and areas throughout the school. They work alongside guides to keep classrooms organized, to tutor younger students, and to help out with paperwork and class events. Students choose which environment they work in by applying for several community service positions within the school. They maintain the same weekly position throughout the year. Students also have the opportunity to plan and contribute to service work in the Knoxville area. These activities allow them to become

aware of their communities and the people in them, to feel valued for their services, and to work on a positive self-concept.



Examples of students' involvement in various communities.

Microeconomy

“The essential reform is this: to put adolescents on the road to achieving economic independence.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori thought it essential for adolescents to participate in experiences of production and exchange as they prepare to enter society as adults. We provide for this activity through the Microeconomy. All students take part in the real, adult-like work of maintaining the garden, crafting, and more. They also market and sell these products during afternoon pickup times and special events. Funds are generally re-invested into this aspect of the program or put towards enrichment opportunities as determined by the students.

In order to provide an economic experience that allows students to make real decisions and real contributions, the Adolescent Community Microeconomy exists separately from the overall school

budget. The students have a separate bank account with First Tennessee to handle real-life financial operations. Animal feed, seed for the garden, ingredients for products, and other materials and services necessary for the operation of the Microeconomy and its related businesses are paid for with sales of products made and produced on-site (as much as possible).

Observation and Evaluation

Advisory Program

Each student is assigned to an advisory guide. The advisory program offers each student and guide a special advisor/advisee relationship. The advisor is an advocate for the student in academic, behavioral, and interpersonal matters. The advisor is also responsible for monitoring the overall progress of advisees throughout the year and is the main contact person for the student, family, and staff.

Advisory meetings occur during each day of academic work, and may include large or small group activities or individual planning. Students use this time to work on organization, time management, character education, leadership skills, social development, and conflict resolution. Advisory meetings are also used to share stories, plan events, and make announcements. These activities focus on developing trusting relationships between students and guides in order to enhance each student's sense of belonging, as well as provide academic and social guidance and support.

Advisors will also conference with their advisees and their families throughout the year. All Nature's Way staff and students are asked to take responsibility for reporting any conflict with a student in the Adolescent Community to the advisor. This includes any inappropriate behavior, problems with peer interaction, or other situations that should be addressed. Issues can be reported by filling out and submitting a "Communication Form," emailing an advisor, or by scheduling a conference with staff. The advisor will review the report and work out an appropriate way for the student(s) to talk about possible solutions for the situation.

The advisor is the main contact person for students, parents, and staff. If students or families have questions, concerns, or need to share information, the student's advisor is the person to contact. Please notify the student's advisor and the office for early or late

dismissal. Also, please schedule conferences through the advisor. Nature's Way staff will direct any concerns about a student in the Adolescent Community to that student's advisor.

Organization

Organization is critical to the establishment of an ordered life. As the adolescent assumes more responsibility with emerging social roles, practice with organizational skills becomes increasingly important.

To develop this skill, students establish a plan to keep track of class assignments and compile their work into binders. Guides assist students with prioritizing, planning, and categorizing work if needed. Students should take time each day to organize, check their work plans, and restore their personal spaces.

Online Tracking of Assignments

Students, staff, and family members use Google Sheets for online record-keeping. This means that guides can track and record the status of work for each student on a rolling basis. Guides will indicate whether assignments are complete, incomplete, missing, or need to be remedied. Students and their family members can access the student's record sheets on Google and check the status of work at any time for all core classes.

In preparation for future learning environments, all 8th grade students receive grades. Assignment grades are posted on the Google Sheets assignment tracker, and final grades for each class are shared with families after each academic cycle. All AC guides adhere to the Knox County Schools grading system.

Homework

Students have scheduled times each day that they are expected to use wisely to work on assignments, conduct research, and obtain assistance. Papers and projects may sometimes require a student to spend time away from school conducting research, writing, studying, etc. It is reasonable for AC students to complete unfinished work and/or practice work at home. It may also be necessary to have weekend work. The time needed to complete work at home will vary from student to student based on individual study habits, skills, and abilities. When students organize their time well, they are better prepared for class, able to juggle outside activities with school work, and able to fulfill

obligations inside and outside of school.

It is important that students learn how to discipline themselves to work at home after school. This is a skill necessary for high school and future learning. Students who use their personal work time at school appropriately may not have much homework. If a student is coming home with a disproportionate amount of homework, families may want to schedule a conference to discuss the matter. Also, it is our expectation that families provide an appropriate time, place, atmosphere, and the supplies necessary to allow the student to complete high-quality work at home.

End-of-Cycle Evaluation

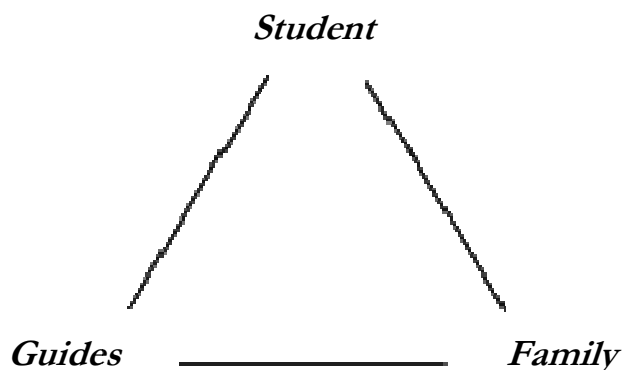
After the conclusion of each cycle, the AC staff will send home an Academic Summary evaluating your student's work based on the following categories: Engagement, Understanding Concepts, Skill Development, Work Management, and Overall Quality of Work. Evaluations use a 1-4 numerical system to indicate progress in specific areas.

The AC staff provides an this summary in addition to feedback on work as it is submitted and returned, assistance for student-led conferences, and more as ways to provide a clear picture of the student's development and progression. Guides are also available upon request for conferences to provide more qualitative feedback on student progress.

Family-School Partnership

Communication between Families and Guides

AC guides value the increasing independence of adolescent students and the essential support of the student's family members. Cooperation between the student, family members, and AC guides are necessary to ensure the student's success in their continued development.



With the help of families, AC guides strive to support students in taking increased responsibility for their learning and development. The AC guides work to establish a supportive learning environment at school. Likewise, it is important for family members to provide an environment at home in which students can focus on homework when needed, and are supported to come to school prepared each day.

Email is a valuable means for communication with guides. The school email address is adminteam@naureswaymontessori.com. The office will forward any email communication to an AC staff member; however, please feel free to contact the AC staff directly.

Gar Secrist

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- Science and Humanities Guide
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Lena Ayoub

- Farm Manager

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Please remember that the advisor is responsible for overseeing the overall progress of advisees throughout the year and is the main contact person for students, family, and staff. If you have questions, concerns, or need to share information, please contact your student's advisor unless there is a specific question for another staff member relating to their academic specialty. Any general questions about Adolescent Community events or programming should be directed to the Program Coordinator.

It is important that you also read the weekly "News You Need" emails from the office, as well as periodic AC Newsletters. Please ensure the school has a record of your current email address. If you are not already part of the Nature's Way email group, please send a message to natureswaymontessori@comcast.net to be added. Also, if your address has changed from last year, please send an email with the new address.

Conferences

New-Student Conferences: In September, during our first academic cycle, new students to the Adolescent Community meet at school with their parents / guardians and their advisor. The purpose of this meeting is to share strengths, challenges, and goals as the student adjusts to life in the AC.

Student-Led Conferences: Twice a year students lead short conferences with their parents / guardians and their advisor about their work. This is a great opportunity to hear student viewpoints and perspectives and to celebrate accomplishments. Students will select pieces of work or other projects to display and discuss with family members. The discussion also incorporates elements regarding goal-setting, planning, work ethic, engagement with work, and other related topics.

Additional Conferences: Family members or AC guides may contact one another to schedule additional conferences as needed. These meetings may involve the student unless family members or guides need to discuss issues privately.

Involvement at Nature's Way

There are many opportunities for family members be actively involved in the Adolescent Community. The staff strives to provide students with guest speakers; and family members are encouraged throughout the year to talk to students about their professions or interests as they relate to activities in the community. Adult family members may also provide job-shadowing or internship experiences in their occupation for our 8th grade students during our Career Exploration program in the spring. If you are interested and able to host a student at your place of employment, please reach out to Gar at gar.secrist@natureswaymontessori.com.

Adult family members are invited to provide transportation, plan special events, and chaperone field trips when appropriate. If driving or chaperoning, please respect the educational and social environment and understand that there are expectations that we have of the adults who are in the presence of these young people. **Each chaperone/driver will need to sign submit a copy of their driver's license and insurance to the office once each year.**

When adult family members volunteer to provide transportation, their own student may ride with them, but AC guides will determine the vehicle arrangements for the other students. Volunteer drivers should refrain from inviting students other than their own to ride with them. This helps us to build an inclusive community during our field trips.

AC Self-Expressions Classes by Family Members

Another opportunity for adult family members to be actively involved in the school is to lead Self Expressions classes for a small group of interested AC students. The goal of this program is to give our students opportunities to choose specific skills and interests to develop. Three times per year, we offer a selection of Self Expressions classes, and students choose the options they are most interested in exploring. Typically the classes involve a small group, usually 3 to 7 students.

We seek to offer a wide range of skills-focused classes, including but not limited to:

- Hobbies and skills such as cooking, woodworking, photography, or filmmaking
- Physical activities including sports, yoga, or martial arts
- Forms of artistic expression or craft making

Our Self Expressions classes typically run for about 10 sessions, one session per week. They take place on Wednesday mornings, and each session is an hour and fifteen minutes in length. We have two time slots to choose from: 8:45-10:00 or 10:15-11:30. If you or someone you know may be

interested in sharing a hobby or skill with AC students, please contact Gar at:

gar.secris@natureswaymontessori.com

Parent/guardian involvement in school life is essential for the success of the students at Nature's Way, and the staff is always grateful for your contributions!

Support for Families

Adolescents need more independence than elementary aged children, but they also need the guidance and support of adults.

It's easy to dismiss ten- to fifteen-year-olds as moody, baffling creatures. Yet, these years are perhaps the most critical time in human development, a juncture at which unmatched physical and intellectual growth, expanding creativity, emerging moral sensibilities, awakening sexuality, and maturing emotions converge. Early adolescence is a time when girls and boys may need the help of parents most—yet it's often a time when they are most reluctant to accept it. And it may be a parent's greatest opportunity to effect positive changes in a child's life.

-Laura Sessions Stepp, *Our Last Best Shot*

Raising early adolescents can be very challenging. Some family members might like more information on what is happening with their children and how they can continue to be a positive influence in their child's life. Family members are welcome to browse and check out the many books located in the library adjacent to the office.

Policies and Procedures

Attendance

Absences are an unavoidable part of school life. Please notify the school and your child's advisor when your child will be absent. Students who are sick need to remain at home until the condition improves. **If there is a planned absence, please provide as much advance notice as possible to the office and AC staff in advance. This will help us to better plan and support your student.**

Daily attendance, including timely arrival and dismissal, is very important for all students. Please schedule family trips to coincide with school vacations. Students who have missed school due to family vacations can fall behind, miss important concepts, or let down group members for group projects in progress. If time out of school cannot be avoided, please contact the Program Coordinator as soon as possible. By giving advance notice, guides can work with the student to plan strategies to help deal with the workload.

For all absences, it is the student's responsibility to ask about missing work, complete assignments that were missed, and meet with other students and guides regarding collaborative work. Family members should assist their children with planning and catching up on missed work, if required. Please give advance notice that you want to pick up assignments for an ill child, and guides or students will strive to compile this. Guides will work with the student to modify assignments should the need arise due to illness.

All absences should be excused. Please refer to the school's attendance policy for more details.

Scheduling Appointments

Due to the collaborative nature of our work, students often cannot make up for time missed at school. Therefore, we strongly discourage the scheduling of appointments during school hours. Please make every effort to schedule medical and dental appointments outside of that time. **If an appointment absolutely must be scheduled during school, please notify guides in advance to plan for the week.**

Likewise, if your student must be picked up early from school, please provide advanced notice to the office and AC guides. We often plan times for interested students to work in small groups on projects and committees in the afternoon according to their interests. Informing AC guides of early departure at least one day ahead helps us to ensure that your student can be involved in the community projects that interest them.

Arrival and Dismissal

AC students enter and depart from the AC deck at the end of the driveway. Please pull as far forward along the right side of the driveway as you can during arrival and dismissal. Refrain from using the parking lot at the end of the driveway for arrival or dismissal. There will be no walk-in drop-offs or dismissals. If you wish to speak with AC guides, please contact us to set up a time to meet.

Students who are not picked up promptly at 3:30 will be dismissed to Extended Day and brought to the dismissal area at the next scheduled dismissal time. Extended Day charges will apply.

Late arrivals must be scheduled in advance. Please contact the office and AC Program Coordinator with your arrival time, and check in at the office in-person to sign in your student. For early departures, please provide advanced notice to the office and AC Program Coordinator, and check in at the office to pick up and sign-out your student.

Medication and Health Concerns

Parents should notify staff of any major or minor health concerns. Also, parents should give any medication that their students needs while at school directly to a staff person. The medication must be placed in a zip-lock bag labeled with the student's name and a completed medication form.

Students may not keep medication in their possession (pocket, backpack, purse, etc.) while at school, regardless of the type of medication.

Prescribed medicines are given for various reasons, and common over-the-counter medications to help with allergies, colds, coughs, and other minor ailments on a regular basis or periodically often have side effects in children. Since observation is a critical component of a guide's role when working with students, it is important to know all medications taken by a child should a change in behavior occur.

If a child is on a regular medication that is designed to affect attention or mood, please notify the AC staff of any change in dosage and/or the timing of doses. Also, please ensure that the staff knows about any other medical conditions, including allergies. If you would like to give the AC staff permission to administer ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or other common medications, please indicate this on the designated form and submit it to the staff along with the medication.

For AC overnight trips, you will need to fill out a separate AC Overnight Medication Schedule form, indicating each time of the day that each medication will need to be taken during the trip. **Please communicate with AC guides well in advance of any medical conditions, dietary requirements, or other ways we can help support your student during their time away from home overnight.** Communicating these needs before our departure day allows AC guides to plan together to support your student.

Supplies

At the beginning of each year, the AC staff sends a list of necessary supplies to each family.

Students are responsible for purchasing and maintaining their own school supplies, including a water bottle, rain gear, work gloves, boots, and a hat for sun protection for work at the farm. These items should be labeled with their name. They should not depend on other class members or guides to provide pencils, pens, or other needed materials. We also ask that students bring a laptop to school for academic work and accessing some assignments online. They should have a charger for the laptop, also labeled with their name.

Projects are an integral part of the AC program. During every cycle, students will complete at least one project designed to further their understanding of the cycle's material. Often students choose to work on projects at home; however, if they plan to do the project at school, they need to be responsible for providing their own supplies (poster boards, adhesives, etc.).

Lunches, Snacks, and Drinks

In addition to their lunches, AC students also need to have snacks that can be easily eaten at the designated snack time and area. Students who stay after school especially need to bring extra snacks. It is also essential for students to keep a **personal water bottle** at school for use throughout the day; there is not a water fountain in the AC space, but there is access to filtered water. Additionally, students must provide their own silverware and napkin with their packed lunch. Soda, coffee and other caffeinated beverages may not be consumed at school. Under no circumstances should candy or fast food be brought to school by students or family members. Gum is also not permitted at school, unless families obtain permission for their student to use it as a tool for focus or necessary sensory input.

At this age, we strongly encourage students to be independent in packing their lunches and snacks for the day. Parents, however, should monitor their student's food and drink choices and reinforce the guidelines for nutritious snacks and lunches.

Dress Code

Adolescence is a sensitive time where students are developing self-esteem and an individual sense of style. Adolescents use clothing styles as a means of expressing identity, an important characteristic of the age.

With this said, the dress code for the Adolescent Community is based on practical needs for daily work and respect for each member of the community. As members of the Adolescent Community are often working outside in all types of weather, each guide and student should dress appropriately for this work. It is important that each member of the community take responsibility for making proper clothing choices. The school has provided guidelines (below) to assist families in making these choices.

Due to the sensitivity of this subject with adolescents, it is best for family members to monitor their student's dress choices and reinforce the dress code guidelines. Staff will relay violations of the dress code to families so that the family can discuss this together and assist the student with future clothing selections.

The following are guidelines for dressing for the school day:

- Students should refrain from wearing clothing or attire that inhibits or restricts participation in class activities or is a distraction to the learning environment.
- As students are often working outside in all types of weather, they must dress properly for these activities every day of school. Students are expected to keep a raincoat and rain boots on campus for outdoor work, and for use outdoors during free time and after school.
- All clothing must adequately cover undergarments in all situations, including when sitting on the floor or engaging in physical activity.
- Clothing should not contain offensive pictures or writing.
- Shoes may be worn in the AC space. If students choose not to wear shoes, they must have something on their feet while at school (socks, sandals, slippers, etc.).

Field Trips and Outings

The Adolescent Community program includes involvement in activities outside of school throughout the year. Field trips are scheduled throughout the course of the year to correspond to what is being studied in the classroom. While many trips are planned in advance, some are spontaneous in nature. These outings are local trips to secure supplies for community work or visit a community asset for class or committee work. Please review and submit the permission form for field trips and outings at the end of this handbook.

Students also spend time away from the school to help in the community and to participate in cultural events. These generally take place during the school day, but some unique opportunities may occasionally arise on nights and weekends. Community-building trips are also planned throughout the year, including the three-day overnight trips at the beginning and end of the school year.

Usually staff and sometimes adult family members of students will provide transportation for students in their personal vehicles. In some cases school buses or vans may be used for field trips.

Eighth Grade Year

The eighth grade year is a special time for Nature's Way students. For most of the eighth grade students, it marks the end of many years spent at our school. Because of this, we have several program components in place to aid in the transition to high school.

In the fall, the school staff hosts a meeting for families in order to share important information for the upcoming transition to high school. Guides are available to write letters of recommendation for students as needed. AC staff are available to work with families to make decisions about placement and to meet specific requirements for high schools.

Problem Solving and Positive Discipline

Adolescence is a critical time during which the brain is undergoing a period of tremendous growth and change, second only to that of the toddler years. This rapid change brings with it unique opportunities and challenges for the adolescent, particularly in the areas of social and emotional life. Just as they are busy exploring new concepts in history or literature, adolescents are also engaged in the important work of learning new lessons in civility, morality, and self-regulation.

Adolescents are working on defining themselves as they strive to understand the "rules" of adult society. Students are actively involved in running their community by using the Community Meeting agenda to discuss issues crucial to running the classroom. In Advisory Group meetings, students take part in social-emotional lessons designed to practice conflict resolution skills.

As adolescents grow socially and emotionally, conflict is a natural part of the process. When students encounter conflict, we encourage them to:

- Take responsibility for their actions and their words
- Go to the person with whom they have a problem
- Learn to solve their own problems

When students feel that they cannot handle a problem on their own, they are encouraged to ask a guide to help mediate the problem. This form of mediation involves a process using a neutral and impartial third person who walks parties through the conflict resolution procedure to resolve their dispute. It is a peaceful process intended to help disputants reach a win-win agreement. Students may use a Communication Form to request mediation or to report a problem that they are having with another member of the community. This is a tool that empowers students to take the first step in resolving a problem.

Responding to Disrespectful Behavior

To recognize the adolescent's need for increased independence, and to provide opportunities to balance increased freedom with increased responsibility, AC guides encourage and support students to reflect on and resolve personal, social, and academic challenges independently at school. However, parents and family members remain essential advocates and supporters for adolescent students. If students continue to experience challenges that they are unable to resolve independently, AC guides will communicate these challenges to families.

If a student engages in serious or recurring behavior that is inconsistent with our core value of respect, AC guides respond according to the following procedure:

- The student's advisor will meet with the student to provide them with the opportunity to share their needs. The advisor will then collaborate with the student to create an agreement to meet these needs while respecting the Adolescent Community and the student's personal academic growth.
- After reaching this agreement, AC guides will follow-up with the student about any behavior that remains inconsistent with the agreement. In this case, they will revisit the agreement with the student and guide them in re-evaluating the situation.
- If a student remains unable to fulfill their agreement responsibly, AC guides will contact the family. Guides will also communicate to the family directly if their student engages in an incident of

significantly disrespectful behavior toward the community. The goal of these communications is to give families the opportunity to advocate for their student's needs while helping the student to participate in the Adolescent Community respectfully and responsibly. We ask that parents or family members discuss the situation with their student and confirm to AC guides that a conversation has taken place.

- If behavior challenges persist, AC guides will schedule a conference with the student and their parents or family members. This conference provides guides, family members, and the student an opportunity to come to an agreement on how to proceed.

While we believe that students benefit most by being present in the classroom, in rare cases a student may be asked to leave school for the day or longer, and in extreme cases, permanently. This may occur if the behavior occurs frequently, is not resolved in a timely manner, and/or reaches an intensity that is a danger to the student, others, or the environment.

Academic Expectations

Academic Integrity

At Nature's Way Montessori School, we value and expect academic integrity, which we define as a commitment from guides and students to demonstrate moral and honest behavior in regards to academics; therefore, any cheating or plagiarizing (attempts to pass off another's work as one's own) is unacceptable.

Computers and Technology

The Adolescent Community is fortunate to have access to a variety of technology tools including computers, laptops, the Internet, graphing calculators, radio, DVD players, etc. Students should use these items responsibly and only for schoolwork. Guides reserve the right to view technology tools at any time to ensure that guidelines are being followed.

Students may use the Internet to research class projects and assignments. **They cannot use computers to access social media, play games, or for other personal projects without permission.** Students are expected to follow the technology guidelines posted in the Adolescent Community and in this document, including the provisions for student-owned laptops. Students must have their own laptops and chargers for work every day. They may use their laptops in open

work cycle and for activities in classes for which guides approve computer use. **Students must use their own computers** for work unless given permission by a guide to use the classroom computer, which is also only available for assigned academic or community work.

Adolescent Community students also have access to a digital camera that can be used for school work with permission. Students must have permission before bringing a personal camera or video camera to school or to use smart phones as recorders/cameras.

Artificial Intelligence

The Adolescent Community academic curriculum emphasizes the development of research and writing skills essential to students' future academic careers and their ability to communicate as adults. The work of the AC includes evaluating the reliability of sources of information, thinking critically about research findings, and learning to synthesize and communicate information effectively. Academic projects allow students to practice these skills while expressing themselves creatively.

Young people now have access to online artificial intelligence (AI) tools that can present information and generate images or written passages. These tools can be powerful and, with proper validation of their output, can produce useful outcomes. However, research into the use of these tools suggests that AI can undermine the engagement, retention, and critical thinking skills associated with learning in young students.

Adolescence is an important time for students to develop the ability to think critically about information and learn to communicate it with originality and creativity. To support the growth of these skills in our students, AI tools may not be used to generate information, images, or written content for any academic or community work for school purposes.

Computer Guidelines

- Use computers responsibly and only for school work.
- Computers must remain silent, unless the student has permission from a guide.
- Computers are only available when approved by a guide.
- Liquids may not be placed at the same table as a computer.
- Computers may only be used indoors.
- Students work individually at their own computers, unless they have permission from a guide to do

group work.

- Due to limited charging spaces, students are expected to charge their computers before bringing them in the morning. Computers may not be charged during classes. During Open Work Cycle, students may charge computers if their charging cable does not cross the floor where others may walk.
- Computers must be used according to all instructions given by guides.
- With permission from guides, students may use wired headphones to listen to audio relating school projects, or to listen to music approved by their parents / guardians for the purpose of focusing during work time. Wireless headphones may not be used, and music may not be shared between students.

To support the responsible use of computers for academic purposes, guides will redirect student misuse of technology. If a student uses their technology in a way that deviates from the above guidelines, guides may ask students to choose work at school that does not require a computer for a 24-hour period. Guides will contact families if a student repeatedly misuses technology, or needs to complete computer work at home if they were unable to do so responsibly at school.

Cell Phone and Smart Device Guidelines

Cell phones, smart phones, or smart watches are not necessary for any school activities. Since these items may distract from the learning experience, **students may not use phones or smart watches at school without special permission. If a student needs to carry a cell phone or smart watch, it must be turned off and stored out-of-sight in a backpack, purse, or cubby while at school during the day.**

Please try to work out personal details with your child during non-school time and avoid making telephone calls or texts directly to your child during the school day. Instead, please call the school if you need to talk to your child. Students may use the school telephone to call home if necessary. The office staff will deliver messages to students; if you or your child must have a conversation, this should take place during a break or free time (unless an emergency).

If needed to facilitate pick up, students may use their phone with permission to call their family **during dismissal time only. Students may ask to call their family or person picking them up to expedite the process. Personal cell phones may only be used in the AC space.** Should there be a change in pick up as mentioned in the “Dismissal” section, a staff member must speak to the

family in order to release the student to someone unauthorized (not found on the Identification sheet). If a student uses a cell phone without permission, the phone will be taken by guides and the family must retrieve it at the end of the day

Nature's Way Montessori School Handbook 2026-2027

Adolescent Community Supplement

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Welcome to the Nature's Way Adolescent Community!

This document is a supplement to the Nature's Way Montessori School Handbook (2026-2027) that provides information on unique aspects of the Adolescent Community. It is important to read both this supplement and the school handbook thoroughly. Our procedures have developed over the years to allow us to work together to provide a safe and supportive environment for our adolescent students. We value feedback from families - please reach out if you have questions about our handbook.

Diversity Statement

Montessori philosophy seeks to achieve peace and equity through education. In accordance with this goal, Nature's Way Montessori School provides a safe, supportive, and developmentally appropriate environment where we can learn together. We honor the value of a diverse community and welcome conversations that aid in understanding our humanity and the world we share. We understand diversity to be valuable and nurture awareness by welcoming people of differing races, ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, abilities, personalities, languages, socio-economic backgrounds, sexualities, gender identities and expressions, political beliefs, religions, and family structures.

Program Overview

"The school should become the place where the child may live in freedom, and this freedom must not be solely the intimate, spiritual liberty of internal growth. The entire organism of the child, from his physiological, vegetative part to his motor activity, ought to find in school the best conditions for development."

– Dr. Maria Montessori

The Adolescent Community staff is committed to Dr. Montessori's ideal of ensuring that the adolescent's needs and tendencies are satisfied appropriately through meaningful work. Whether through microeconomic activities, service in the community, or lessons in the classroom, the prepared environment of the Adolescent Community strives to facilitate adolescents' self-construction and formation of the personality while preparing them for entry into adult life and society.

As described in Dr. Montessori's book *From Childhood to Adolescence*, the "Plan of Study and Work" is both an overview of the program as well as an exploration of the kinds of work required by the adolescent.

There are also descriptions of policy and procedures critical to the overall function of the school, sample forms, and other information.

Mission Statement of the Adolescent Community

“There are two needs of the adolescent: for protection during the time of the difficult physical transition, and for an understanding of the society which he is about to enter to play his part as a human...”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Keeping this in mind, it is our mission to support the natural development of our adolescent students while providing them with a safe environment in which they can explore means of social and economic independence. We do this by using the land as a point of departure for community engagement, experiences of production and exchange, self-expression, cognitive formation, and preparation for adult life.

Vision of the Adolescent Community

Nature’s Way Montessori School will provide a rich environment rooted in the work of Maria Montessori, where our students can develop to their full potential and prepare to enter adult life. We strive to assist the development of the adolescent with the following:

- Supporting the natural human development of the adolescent
- Connecting the adolescent to the land through scientific and historic studies
- Providing opportunities to explore a variety of social and economic roles
- Engaging both the head and the hands in purposeful activity
- Stimulating valorization through meaningful work
- Assisting the adolescent to become independent
- Promoting the moral development of the adolescent
- Encouraging self-expression and critical thinking skills
- Fostering a lifelong love of learning
- Learning what it means to make a contribution

- Understanding interdependency with the rest of the world
- Adapting to a variety of work demands for the sake of others; the beginning of social consciousness
- Understanding work as a product of commerce necessary to community life and leading to a beginning view of economic independence and interdependence
- Learning the meaning of rules and their importance to harmonious living
- Learning to live in domestic relations with others; to work through human problems

from David J. Kahn (in part)—The Hershey Montessori Farm School

Land Partnership at Murphy Springs Farm

“Work in the country [has] wide social connotations of productiveness and earning power. The observation of nature has not only a side that is philosophical and scientific, it has also a side of social experiences that leads on to the observations of civilization and the life of men.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Nature’s Way Montessori School is excited to continue developing the “farm” component of our Plan of Study and Work. Thanks to the generosity of Kevin Murphy of Murphy Springs Farm, the school has been in a land partnership since 2014 for educational and agricultural work.

On the Nature’s Way Farm, students will use the space as a “limitless field for scientific and historic studies” as described by Maria Montessori. This includes the cultivation of crops for sale to the community for the microeconomy and for use in Science Occupations and Humanities classes. Students also use the farm as a learning environment for science topics, such as energy, genetics, and soil chemistry.

In addition to Murphy Springs Farm, the Southland Realty Group has given permission for the school to access its property, adjacent to the northern side of the nature preserve. White’s Creek runs through this land, which also contains sinkholes, small caves, and other forms of Karst topography. Students have used this space for a number of Science Occupations classes.

Adolescent Community Plan of Study and Work

“This means there is an opportunity to learn both academically and through actual experience what are the elements of social life.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Mathematics

“Mathematics are necessary because intelligence today is no longer natural but mathematical, and without development and education in mathematics it is impossible to understand or take any part in the special forms of progress characteristic of our times.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori observed that mathematical thinking is a gift to humans at birth, as all humans possess mathematical minds. Early adolescents are developing their sense of self and their place in the world. Our mathematics program provides a safe environment for students to accomplish these endeavors through nurturing confidence, giving opportunities to explore and apply concepts deeply, and developing a problem-solving style.

The mathematics program incorporates the theoretical and applied study of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and measurement and is designed to meet the standards expected for this age by the state while preserving the applied, hands-on approach a Montessori student is accustomed to. Students explore the relationships between abstract concepts and may apply them specifically in math projects. Additionally, students apply mathematics knowledge during other academic classes and the microeconomy.

The Montessori mathematics methodology includes:

- the option for mathematics projects that explore math through topics of interest to the students
- activity- and discovery-based learning
- the history of ideas
- the use of hands-on materials
- individually paced and individually designed work and lessons
- math seminars aimed at developing math communication and problem-solving skills

The Adolescent Community utilizes the mathematics curriculum from the Math Institute, designed by a Montessori math teacher for adolescents. It allows students to work at their own pace, practicing new concepts and reinforcing previous knowledge before moving on to further concepts. Students have the opportunity to move through up to 3 levels of Integrated Math as they are ready, though most students will move through Level 2. When needed,

assistance or extension activities are provided during individual or small-group workshops or tutorials.

Science Occupations

Science Occupations are project-based science classes in which students learn scientific concepts through the lens of a problem or issue that affects our school, community, or region. Emphasis is placed on the application of adult-like scientific practice in a variety of occupations in order to make an authentic and meaningful contribution.

Students at Nature's Way have the opportunity to learn about core concept areas and have the opportunity to delve deeper into a related topic of interest to them. The courses also emphasize interdisciplinary skills that will be valuable in later educational settings such as note taking, conducting scientific experiments, working in teams, and scientific writing.

Science Occupations occur in four cycles. The course offerings incorporate several disciplines, such as studying chemistry through the soil, or genetics through the garden. Each cycle of study has a life, earth, or physical science as the core emphasis. Students at Nature's Way will take four (4) life sciences, one (1) earth science, and three (3) physical sciences as shown in the table below. This structure also acknowledges the curricular requirements suggested by the Tennessee Department of Education.

Academic Year	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
A	Cell Biology (L)	Energy (P)	Chemistry (P)	Water (L)
B	Genetics and Reproduction (L)	Earth Studies (E)	Physics (P)	Sustainability (L)

Please note that academic years A and B will alternate.

Humanities

“The study of the history of mankind...should be treated as far as possible as a complete whole, from which special periods can be chosen for individual study.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

The Adolescent Community's Humanities curriculum spans the whole of human history each year. It tells the story of what it means to be human both thematically and chronologically, incorporating history, geography, literature, art, music, philosophy, and more. As students examine the creation of human culture throughout time, they are able to think critically about the past and work toward constructing their own selves for the future. Montessori concepts drive the curriculum and scope, as each study addresses the following key themes:

- History as a scholarly pursuit
- Self-expression through music, drama, and art
- Nature vs. supranature (humanity's alteration of the natural world for its benefit)
- Elements of production and exchange
- Discoveries, inventions, and explorations
- Migrations and invasions

The class also acknowledges Tennessee state social studies standards and addresses world and United States history accordingly. The Humanities curriculum is organized into four primary themes. Students receive key lessons on a given topic before engaging in individualized work. These themes are consistent for both academic years, with one year focusing on U.S history and the alternating year focusing on world history. For each theme, one or two topics may be available for any given cycle each year. These offerings are subject to change due to the needs and interests of the community.

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
Early Agriculture	Classical Civilizations	Societies in Transition	Issues in Modern Life

Early Agriculture can include Egypt, Mesopotamia, Native Americans, the Maya, Indus Valley

Classical Civilizations can include the Aztec, the Inca, US Nationhood, Classical China, Classical Japan, Classical Rome, etc.

Societies in Transition can include U.S. Westward Expansion, the Middle Ages, Exploration and Colonization, U.S. Civil War, World War II, the Cold War, and World Religions

Issues in Modern Life can include the Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Era, climate change, immigration, global food and water issues, contemporary women's issues, and sustainability

Language Arts

"Actual writing is an external manifestation of an inner impulse. It is a pleasure that comes from carrying out a higher activity and not simply an exercise."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

In our Language Arts class, students learn fundamental concepts pertaining to the study of language, such as mechanics of writing and speech, composition, grammar, vocabulary, and more. Students explore literature in book groups and refine literary analysis techniques together, as well as partaking in independent reading throughout the year. Additionally, the class allows students to collaborate on projects related to current studies and share them with each other, while also exploring various modes of writing and researching.

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
7th Grade	Rhetoric in Folklore	Rhetoric in Poetry	Rhetoric in Drama	Rhetoric in Southern Literature
8th Grade	Rhetoric	Poetry	Socio-linguistics	Creative Writing

Spanish

"In the past one language was enough, but today it is a social convention that education should include the ability to read and write correctly in several languages."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

All Nature's Way students engage in the study of Spanish, with the Adolescent Community working towards a practical use of the language. The theme-based class involves both group activities and individual work focusing on interpersonal, interpretive and presentational communication skills. Vocabulary and grammar topics are incorporated throughout. Students also examine themes covered in other classes through the lens of the Hispanic world, gaining a broader perspective of the people

who speak the language they are learning. In addition to fostering communicative competence, emphasis is placed on cultural understanding through the use of authentic texts, music and artifacts.

Mini-Cycle

During the Mini-Cycle, students complete a research project based on the topic of their choice. These projects are designed to match the skills, abilities, and interests of each student. There is an opportunity to do intermediate or advanced level projects.

Students work with their advisors and families to narrow down ideas and to pick a topic that is academically and developmentally appropriate. Each student is then responsible for conducting research, writing a research paper, and preparing visual aids to accompany their project. During the last week of the Mini-Cycle, students share what they have learned by presenting their research to the class. Families are invited and encouraged to attend the presentations.

Self-Expression Classes

The self-expression classes nurture the adolescent's tendency toward creative work and provide activity and variety in the weekly schedule. The classes run for approximately ten weeks in three sessions: one in fall, winter, and spring. Options include art, crafts, theater, music, physical education, writing, debate, and more. Students have the opportunity to choose self-expression classes based on their individual interests. Each class offered falls into one of the following categories: Musical, Physical, Creative, or Life Skills. Although students may express a preference for a specific class, they must take at least one class in each category over the course of their time in the AC.

Workshops

Workshops are a time for committee meetings, managerial work, class-related workshop intensives, specific instruction on particular topics, and microeconomy tasks. This work is a critical component of the curriculum and offers essential opportunities for community growth and individual contributions. Students are also able to plan and lead workshop sessions.

Committees

Students and adults form committees on an as-needed basis throughout the year to meet needs in the

community. Committees may work on AC guidelines, plan for an upcoming event, coordinate service outings, or accomplish some task for the school or greater Knoxville community.

Literature Seminar

Seminar is a chance for members of a group to share questions and insights about a text, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of each other and the content. Students learn the proper procedures for active listening, building upon and appreciating others' ideas, and sharing ideas in a group setting. Formal seminar discussions occur as literature circles and are also scheduled on occasion in other academic classes.

Community Work and Care of the Environment

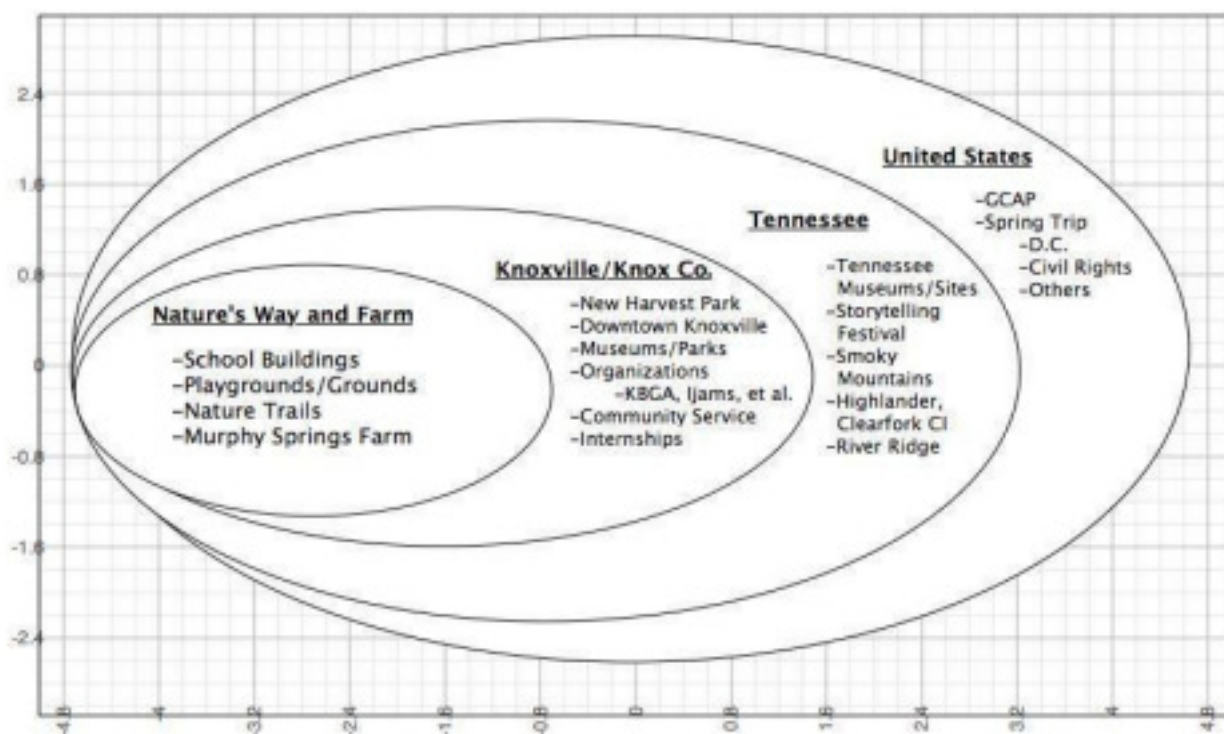
Adolescents have a developmental need to experience real, meaningful work in a wider social context. This involves both work of the head and the hand. Because of this need, manual work is an integral part of the Adolescent Community experience. Students learn directly that their contributions are essential to the successful functioning of the community.

While there is important work that needs to be addressed daily, time is also set aside for “Community Work” in order to take on larger projects. These initiatives are wide-ranging and include such things as building projects, canning vegetables, clearing trails, cleaning out the chicken coop, planting, cultivating, harvesting, making crafts, writing newsletter articles, baking, and more. Each afternoon all students contribute to the restoration of the environment, which is necessary for keeping the classroom spaces clean and orderly. The students rotate through different jobs in all spaces throughout the year. Guides assist and encourage these jobs to be done with care and attention to detail.

Community Service

Adolescents are involved in community service at Nature's Way and beyond. At school, students participate in a weekly community service program where they contribute to other classrooms and areas throughout the school. They work alongside guides to keep classrooms organized, to tutor younger students, and to help out with paperwork and class events. Students choose which environment they work in by applying for several community service positions within the school. They maintain the same weekly position throughout the year. Students also have the opportunity to plan and contribute to service work in the Knoxville area. These activities allow them to become

aware of their communities and the people in them, to feel valued for their services, and to work on a positive self-concept.



Examples of students' involvement in various communities.

Microeconomy

“The essential reform is this: to put adolescents on the road to achieving economic independence.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori thought it essential for adolescents to participate in experiences of production and exchange as they prepare to enter society as adults. We provide for this activity through the Microeconomy. All students take part in the real, adult-like work of maintaining the garden, crafting, and more. They also market and sell these products during afternoon pickup times and special events. Funds are generally re-invested into this aspect of the program or put towards enrichment opportunities as determined by the students.

In order to provide an economic experience that allows students to make real decisions and real contributions, the Adolescent Community Microeconomy exists separately from the overall school

budget. The students have a separate bank account with First Tennessee to handle real-life financial operations. Animal feed, seed for the garden, ingredients for products, and other materials and services necessary for the operation of the Microeconomy and its related businesses are paid for with sales of products made and produced on-site (as much as possible).

Observation and Evaluation

Advisory Program

Each student is assigned to an advisory guide. The advisory program offers each student and guide a special advisor/advisee relationship. The advisor is an advocate for the student in academic, behavioral, and interpersonal matters. The advisor is also responsible for monitoring the overall progress of advisees throughout the year and is the main contact person for the student, family, and staff.

Advisory meetings occur during each day of academic work, and may include large or small group activities or individual planning. Students use this time to work on organization, time management, character education, leadership skills, social development, and conflict resolution. Advisory meetings are also used to share stories, plan events, and make announcements. These activities focus on developing trusting relationships between students and guides in order to enhance each student's sense of belonging, as well as provide academic and social guidance and support.

Advisors will also conference with their advisees and their families throughout the year. All Nature's Way staff and students are asked to take responsibility for reporting any conflict with a student in the Adolescent Community to the advisor. This includes any inappropriate behavior, problems with peer interaction, or other situations that should be addressed. Issues can be reported by filling out and submitting a "Communication Form," emailing an advisor, or by scheduling a conference with staff. The advisor will review the report and work out an appropriate way for the student(s) to talk about possible solutions for the situation.

The advisor is the main contact person for students, parents, and staff. If students or families have questions, concerns, or need to share information, the student's advisor is the person to contact. Please notify the student's advisor and the office for early or late

dismissal. Also, please schedule conferences through the advisor. Nature's Way staff will direct any concerns about a student in the Adolescent Community to that student's advisor.

Organization

Organization is critical to the establishment of an ordered life. As the adolescent assumes more responsibility with emerging social roles, practice with organizational skills becomes increasingly important.

To develop this skill, students establish a plan to keep track of class assignments and compile their work into binders. Guides assist students with prioritizing, planning, and categorizing work if needed. Students should take time each day to organize, check their work plans, and restore their personal spaces.

Online Tracking of Assignments

Students, staff, and family members use Google Sheets for online record-keeping. This means that guides can track and record the status of work for each student on a rolling basis. Guides will indicate whether assignments are complete, incomplete, missing, or need to be remedied. Students and their family members can access the student's record sheets on Google and check the status of work at any time for all core classes.

In preparation for future learning environments, all 8th grade students receive grades. Assignment grades are posted on the Google Sheets assignment tracker, and final grades for each class are shared with families after each academic cycle. All AC guides adhere to the Knox County Schools grading system.

Homework

Students have scheduled times each day that they are expected to use wisely to work on assignments, conduct research, and obtain assistance. Papers and projects may sometimes require a student to spend time away from school conducting research, writing, studying, etc. It is reasonable for AC students to complete unfinished work and/or practice work at home. It may also be necessary to have weekend work. The time needed to complete work at home will vary from student to student based on individual study habits, skills, and abilities. When students organize their time well, they are better prepared for class, able to juggle outside activities with school work, and able to fulfill

obligations inside and outside of school.

It is important that students learn how to discipline themselves to work at home after school. This is a skill necessary for high school and future learning. Students who use their personal work time at school appropriately may not have much homework. If a student is coming home with a disproportionate amount of homework, families may want to schedule a conference to discuss the matter. Also, it is our expectation that families provide an appropriate time, place, atmosphere, and the supplies necessary to allow the student to complete high-quality work at home.

End-of-Cycle Evaluation

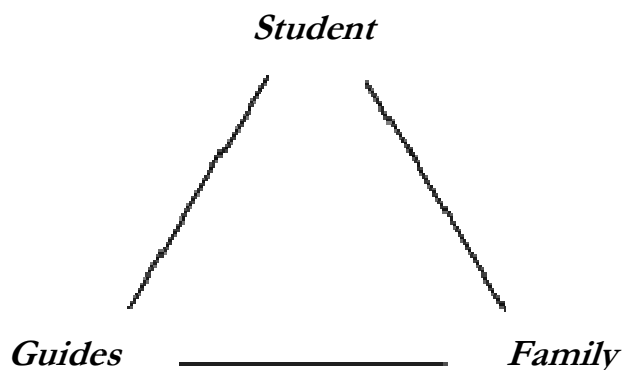
After the conclusion of each cycle, the AC staff will send home an Academic Summary evaluating your student's work based on the following categories: Engagement, Understanding Concepts, Skill Development, Work Management, and Overall Quality of Work. Evaluations use a 1-4 numerical system to indicate progress in specific areas.

The AC staff provides an this summary in addition to feedback on work as it is submitted and returned, assistance for student-led conferences, and more as ways to provide a clear picture of the student's development and progression. Guides are also available upon request for conferences to provide more qualitative feedback on student progress.

Family-School Partnership

Communication between Families and Guides

AC guides value the increasing independence of adolescent students and the essential support of the student's family members. Cooperation between the student, family members, and AC guides are necessary to ensure the student's success in their continued development.



With the help of families, AC guides strive to support students in taking increased responsibility for their learning and development. The AC guides work to establish a supportive learning environment at school. Likewise, it is important for family members to provide an environment at home in which students can focus on homework when needed, and are supported to come to school prepared each day.

Email is a valuable means for communication with guides. The school email address is adminteam@naureswaymontessori.com. The office will forward any email communication to an AC staff member; however, please feel free to contact the AC staff directly.

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- Advisor

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Please remember that the advisor is responsible for overseeing the overall progress of advisees throughout the year and is the main contact person for students, family, and staff. If you have questions, concerns, or need to share information, please contact your student's advisor unless there is a specific question for another staff member relating to their academic specialty. Any general questions about Adolescent Community events or programming should be directed to the Program Coordinator.

It is important that you also read the weekly "News You Need" emails from the office, as well as periodic AC Newsletters. Please ensure the school has a record of your current email address. If you are not already part of the Nature's Way email group, please send a message to natureswaymontessori@comcast.net to be added. Also, if your address has changed from last year, please send an email with the new address.

Conferences

New-Student Conferences: In September, during our first academic cycle, new students to the Adolescent Community meet at school with their parents / guardians and their advisor. The purpose of this meeting is to share strengths, challenges, and goals as the student adjusts to life in the AC.

Student-Led Conferences: Twice a year students lead short conferences with their parents / guardians and their advisor about their work. This is a great opportunity to hear student viewpoints and perspectives and to celebrate accomplishments. Students will select pieces of work or other projects to display and discuss with family members. The discussion also incorporates elements regarding goal-setting, planning, work ethic, engagement with work, and other related topics.

Additional Conferences: Family members or AC guides may contact one another to schedule additional conferences as needed. These meetings may involve the student unless family members or guides need to discuss issues privately.

Involvement at Nature's Way

There are many opportunities for family members be actively involved in the Adolescent Community. The staff strives to provide students with guest speakers; and family members are encouraged throughout the year to talk to students about their professions or interests as they relate to activities in the community. Adult family members may also provide job-shadowing or internship experiences in their occupation for our 8th grade students during our Career Exploration program in the spring. If you are interested and able to host a student at your place of employment, please reach out to Gar at gar.secrist@natureswaymontessori.com.

Adult family members are invited to provide transportation, plan special events, and chaperone field trips when appropriate. If driving or chaperoning, please respect the educational and social environment and understand that there are expectations that we have of the adults who are in the presence of these young people. **Each chaperone/driver will need to sign submit a copy of their driver's license and insurance to the office once each year.**

When adult family members volunteer to provide transportation, their own student may ride with them, but AC guides will determine the vehicle arrangements for the other students. Volunteer drivers should refrain from inviting students other than their own to ride with them. This helps us to build an inclusive community during our field trips.

AC Self-Expressions Classes by Family Members

Another opportunity for adult family members to be actively involved in the school is to lead Self Expressions classes for a small group of interested AC students. The goal of this program is to give our students opportunities to choose specific skills and interests to develop. Three times per year, we offer a selection of Self Expressions classes, and students choose the options they are most interested in exploring. Typically the classes involve a small group, usually 3 to 7 students.

We seek to offer a wide range of skills-focused classes, including but not limited to:

- Hobbies and skills such as cooking, woodworking, photography, or filmmaking
- Physical activities including sports, yoga, or martial arts
- Forms of artistic expression or craft making

Our Self Expressions classes typically run for about 10 sessions, one session per week. They take place on Wednesday mornings, and each session is an hour and fifteen minutes in length. We have two time slots to choose from: 8:45-10:00 or 10:15-11:30. If you or someone you know may be

interested in sharing a hobby or skill with AC students, please contact Gar at:

gar.secris@natureswaymontessori.com

Parent/guardian involvement in school life is essential for the success of the students at Nature's Way, and the staff is always grateful for your contributions!

Support for Families

Adolescents need more independence than elementary aged children, but they also need the guidance and support of adults.

It's easy to dismiss ten- to fifteen-year-olds as moody, baffling creatures. Yet, these years are perhaps the most critical time in human development, a juncture at which unmatched physical and intellectual growth, expanding creativity, emerging moral sensibilities, awakening sexuality, and maturing emotions converge. Early adolescence is a time when girls and boys may need the help of parents most—yet it's often a time when they are most reluctant to accept it. And it may be a parent's greatest opportunity to effect positive changes in a child's life.

-Laura Sessions Stepp, *Our Last Best Shot*

Raising early adolescents can be very challenging. Some family members might like more information on what is happening with their children and how they can continue to be a positive influence in their child's life. Family members are welcome to browse and check out the many books located in the library adjacent to the office.

Policies and Procedures

Attendance

Absences are an unavoidable part of school life. Please notify the school and your child's advisor when your child will be absent. Students who are sick need to remain at home until the condition improves. **If there is a planned absence, please provide as much advance notice as possible to the office and AC staff in advance. This will help us to better plan and support your student.**

Daily attendance, including timely arrival and dismissal, is very important for all students. Please schedule family trips to coincide with school vacations. Students who have missed school due to family vacations can fall behind, miss important concepts, or let down group members for group projects in progress. If time out of school cannot be avoided, please contact the Program Coordinator as soon as possible. By giving advance notice, guides can work with the student to plan strategies to help deal with the workload.

For all absences, it is the student's responsibility to ask about missing work, complete assignments that were missed, and meet with other students and guides regarding collaborative work. Family members should assist their children with planning and catching up on missed work, if required. Please give advance notice that you want to pick up assignments for an ill child, and guides or students will strive to compile this. Guides will work with the student to modify assignments should the need arise due to illness.

All absences should be excused. Please refer to the school's attendance policy for more details.

Scheduling Appointments

Due to the collaborative nature of our work, students often cannot make up for time missed at school. Therefore, we strongly discourage the scheduling of appointments during school hours. Please make every effort to schedule medical and dental appointments outside of that time. **If an appointment absolutely must be scheduled during school, please notify guides in advance to plan for the week.**

Likewise, if your student must be picked up early from school, please provide advanced notice to the office and AC guides. We often plan times for interested students to work in small groups on projects and committees in the afternoon according to their interests. Informing AC guides of early departure at least one day ahead helps us to ensure that your student can be involved in the community projects that interest them.

Arrival and Dismissal

AC students enter and depart from the AC deck at the end of the driveway. Please pull as far forward along the right side of the driveway as you can during arrival and dismissal. Refrain from using the parking lot at the end of the driveway for arrival or dismissal. There will be no walk-in drop-offs or dismissals. If you wish to speak with AC guides, please contact us to set up a time to meet.

Students who are not picked up promptly at 3:30 will be dismissed to Extended Day and brought to the dismissal area at the next scheduled dismissal time. Extended Day charges will apply.

Late arrivals must be scheduled in advance. Please contact the office and AC Program Coordinator with your arrival time, and check in at the office in-person to sign in your student. For early departures, please provide advanced notice to the office and AC Program Coordinator, and check in at the office to pick up and sign-out your student.

Medication and Health Concerns

Parents should notify staff of any major or minor health concerns. Also, parents should give any medication that their students needs while at school directly to a staff person. The medication must be placed in a zip-lock bag labeled with the student's name and a completed medication form.

Students may not keep medication in their possession (pocket, backpack, purse, etc.) while at school, regardless of the type of medication.

Prescribed medicines are given for various reasons, and common over-the-counter medications to help with allergies, colds, coughs, and other minor ailments on a regular basis or periodically often have side effects in children. Since observation is a critical component of a guide's role when working with students, it is important to know all medications taken by a child should a change in behavior occur.

If a child is on a regular medication that is designed to affect attention or mood, please notify the AC staff of any change in dosage and/or the timing of doses. Also, please ensure that the staff knows about any other medical conditions, including allergies. If you would like to give the AC staff permission to administer ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or other common medications, please indicate this on the designated form and submit it to the staff along with the medication.

For AC overnight trips, you will need to fill out a separate AC Overnight Medication Schedule form, indicating each time of the day that each medication will need to be taken during the trip. **Please communicate with AC guides well in advance of any medical conditions, dietary requirements, or other ways we can help support your student during their time away from home overnight.** Communicating these needs before our departure day allows AC guides to plan together to support your student.

Supplies

At the beginning of each year, the AC staff sends a list of necessary supplies to each family.

Students are responsible for purchasing and maintaining their own school supplies, including a water bottle, rain gear, work gloves, boots, and a hat for sun protection for work at the farm. These items should be labeled with their name. They should not depend on other class members or guides to provide pencils, pens, or other needed materials. We also ask that students bring a laptop to school for academic work and accessing some assignments online. They should have a charger for the laptop, also labeled with their name.

Projects are an integral part of the AC program. During every cycle, students will complete at least one project designed to further their understanding of the cycle's material. Often students choose to work on projects at home; however, if they plan to do the project at school, they need to be responsible for providing their own supplies (poster boards, adhesives, etc.).

Lunches, Snacks, and Drinks

In addition to their lunches, AC students also need to have snacks that can be easily eaten at the designated snack time and area. Students who stay after school especially need to bring extra snacks. It is also essential for students to keep a **personal water bottle** at school for use throughout the day; there is not a water fountain in the AC space, but there is access to filtered water. Additionally, students must provide their own silverware and napkin with their packed lunch. Soda, coffee and other caffeinated beverages may not be consumed at school. Under no circumstances should candy or fast food be brought to school by students or family members. Gum is also not permitted at school, unless families obtain permission for their student to use it as a tool for focus or necessary sensory input.

At this age, we strongly encourage students to be independent in packing their lunches and snacks for the day. Parents, however, should monitor their student's food and drink choices and reinforce the guidelines for nutritious snacks and lunches.

Dress Code

Adolescence is a sensitive time where students are developing self-esteem and an individual sense of style. Adolescents use clothing styles as a means of expressing identity, an important characteristic of the age.

With this said, the dress code for the Adolescent Community is based on practical needs for daily work and respect for each member of the community. As members of the Adolescent Community are often working outside in all types of weather, each guide and student should dress appropriately for this work. It is important that each member of the community take responsibility for making proper clothing choices. The school has provided guidelines (below) to assist families in making these choices.

Due to the sensitivity of this subject with adolescents, it is best for family members to monitor their student's dress choices and reinforce the dress code guidelines. Staff will relay violations of the dress code to families so that the family can discuss this together and assist the student with future clothing selections.

The following are guidelines for dressing for the school day:

- Students should refrain from wearing clothing or attire that inhibits or restricts participation in class activities or is a distraction to the learning environment.
- As students are often working outside in all types of weather, they must dress properly for these activities every day of school. Students are expected to keep a raincoat and rain boots on campus for outdoor work, and for use outdoors during free time and after school.
- All clothing must adequately cover undergarments in all situations, including when sitting on the floor or engaging in physical activity.
- Clothing should not contain offensive pictures or writing.
- Shoes may be worn in the AC space. If students choose not to wear shoes, they must have something on their feet while at school (socks, sandals, slippers, etc.).

Field Trips and Outings

The Adolescent Community program includes involvement in activities outside of school throughout the year. Field trips are scheduled throughout the course of the year to correspond to what is being studied in the classroom. While many trips are planned in advance, some are spontaneous in nature. These outings are local trips to secure supplies for community work or visit a community asset for class or committee work. Please review and submit the permission form for field trips and outings at the end of this handbook.

Students also spend time away from the school to help in the community and to participate in cultural events. These generally take place during the school day, but some unique opportunities may occasionally arise on nights and weekends. Community-building trips are also planned throughout the year, including the three-day overnight trips at the beginning and end of the school year.

Usually staff and sometimes adult family members of students will provide transportation for students in their personal vehicles. In some cases school buses or vans may be used for field trips.

Eighth Grade Year

The eighth grade year is a special time for Nature's Way students. For most of the eighth grade students, it marks the end of many years spent at our school. Because of this, we have several program components in place to aid in the transition to high school.

In the fall, the school staff hosts a meeting for families in order to share important information for the upcoming transition to high school. Guides are available to write letters of recommendation for students as needed. AC staff are available to work with families to make decisions about placement and to meet specific requirements for high schools.

Problem Solving and Positive Discipline

Adolescence is a critical time during which the brain is undergoing a period of tremendous growth and change, second only to that of the toddler years. This rapid change brings with it unique opportunities and challenges for the adolescent, particularly in the areas of social and emotional life. Just as they are busy exploring new concepts in history or literature, adolescents are also engaged in the important work of learning new lessons in civility, morality, and self-regulation.

Adolescents are working on defining themselves as they strive to understand the "rules" of adult society. Students are actively involved in running their community by using the Community Meeting agenda to discuss issues crucial to running the classroom. In Advisory Group meetings, students take part in social-emotional lessons designed to practice conflict resolution skills.

As adolescents grow socially and emotionally, conflict is a natural part of the process. When students encounter conflict, we encourage them to:

- Take responsibility for their actions and their words
- Go to the person with whom they have a problem
- Learn to solve their own problems

When students feel that they cannot handle a problem on their own, they are encouraged to ask a guide to help mediate the problem. This form of mediation involves a process using a neutral and impartial third person who walks parties through the conflict resolution procedure to resolve their dispute. It is a peaceful process intended to help disputants reach a win-win agreement. Students may use a Communication Form to request mediation or to report a problem that they are having with another member of the community. This is a tool that empowers students to take the first step in resolving a problem.

Responding to Disrespectful Behavior

To recognize the adolescent's need for increased independence, and to provide opportunities to balance increased freedom with increased responsibility, AC guides encourage and support students to reflect on and resolve personal, social, and academic challenges independently at school. However, parents and family members remain essential advocates and supporters for adolescent students. If students continue to experience challenges that they are unable to resolve independently, AC guides will communicate these challenges to families.

If a student engages in serious or recurring behavior that is inconsistent with our core value of respect, AC guides respond according to the following procedure:

- The student's advisor will meet with the student to provide them with the opportunity to share their needs. The advisor will then collaborate with the student to create an agreement to meet these needs while respecting the Adolescent Community and the student's personal academic growth.
- After reaching this agreement, AC guides will follow-up with the student about any behavior that remains inconsistent with the agreement. In this case, they will revisit the agreement with the student and guide them in re-evaluating the situation.
- If a student remains unable to fulfill their agreement responsibly, AC guides will contact the family. Guides will also communicate to the family directly if their student engages in an incident of

significantly disrespectful behavior toward the community. The goal of these communications is to give families the opportunity to advocate for their student's needs while helping the student to participate in the Adolescent Community respectfully and responsibly. We ask that parents or family members discuss the situation with their student and confirm to AC guides that a conversation has taken place.

- If behavior challenges persist, AC guides will schedule a conference with the student and their parents or family members. This conference provides guides, family members, and the student an opportunity to come to an agreement on how to proceed.

While we believe that students benefit most by being present in the classroom, in rare cases a student may be asked to leave school for the day or longer, and in extreme cases, permanently. This may occur if the behavior occurs frequently, is not resolved in a timely manner, and/or reaches an intensity that is a danger to the student, others, or the environment.

Academic Expectations

Academic Integrity

At Nature's Way Montessori School, we value and expect academic integrity, which we define as a commitment from guides and students to demonstrate moral and honest behavior in regards to academics; therefore, any cheating or plagiarizing (attempts to pass off another's work as one's own) is unacceptable.

Computers and Technology

The Adolescent Community is fortunate to have access to a variety of technology tools including computers, laptops, the Internet, graphing calculators, radio, DVD players, etc. Students should use these items responsibly and only for schoolwork. Guides reserve the right to view technology tools at any time to ensure that guidelines are being followed.

Students may use the Internet to research class projects and assignments. **They cannot use computers to access social media, play games, or for other personal projects without permission.** Students are expected to follow the technology guidelines posted in the Adolescent Community and in this document, including the provisions for student-owned laptops. Students must have their own laptops and chargers for work every day. They may use their laptops in open

work cycle and for activities in classes for which guides approve computer use. **Students must use their own computers** for work unless given permission by a guide to use the classroom computer, which is also only available for assigned academic or community work.

Adolescent Community students also have access to a digital camera that can be used for school work with permission. Students must have permission before bringing a personal camera or video camera to school or to use smart phones as recorders/cameras.

Artificial Intelligence

The Adolescent Community academic curriculum emphasizes the development of research and writing skills essential to students' future academic careers and their ability to communicate as adults. The work of the AC includes evaluating the reliability of sources of information, thinking critically about research findings, and learning to synthesize and communicate information effectively. Academic projects allow students to practice these skills while expressing themselves creatively.

Young people now have access to online artificial intelligence (AI) tools that can present information and generate images or written passages. These tools can be powerful and, with proper validation of their output, can produce useful outcomes. However, research into the use of these tools suggests that AI can undermine the engagement, retention, and critical thinking skills associated with learning in young students.

Adolescence is an important time for students to develop the ability to think critically about information and learn to communicate it with originality and creativity. To support the growth of these skills in our students, AI tools may not be used to generate information, images, or written content for any academic or community work for school purposes.

Computer Guidelines

- Use computers responsibly and only for school work.
- Computers must remain silent, unless the student has permission from a guide.
- Computers are only available when approved by a guide.
- Liquids may not be placed at the same table as a computer.
- Computers may only be used indoors.
- Students work individually at their own computers, unless they have permission from a guide to do

group work.

- Due to limited charging spaces, students are expected to charge their computers before bringing them in the morning. Computers may not be charged during classes. During Open Work Cycle, students may charge computers if their charging cable does not cross the floor where others may walk.
- Computers must be used according to all instructions given by guides.
- With permission from guides, students may use wired headphones to listen to audio relating school projects, or to listen to music approved by their parents / guardians for the purpose of focusing during work time. Wireless headphones may not be used, and music may not be shared between students.

To support the responsible use of computers for academic purposes, guides will redirect student misuse of technology. If a student uses their technology in a way that deviates from the above guidelines, guides may ask students to choose work at school that does not require a computer for a 24-hour period. Guides will contact families if a student repeatedly misuses technology, or needs to complete computer work at home if they were unable to do so responsibly at school.

Cell Phone and Smart Device Guidelines

Cell phones, smart phones, or smart watches are not necessary for any school activities. Since these items may distract from the learning experience, **students may not use phones or smart watches at school without special permission. If a student needs to carry a cell phone or smart watch, it must be turned off and stored out-of-sight in a backpack, purse, or cubby while at school during the day.**

Please try to work out personal details with your child during non-school time and avoid making telephone calls or texts directly to your child during the school day. Instead, please call the school if you need to talk to your child. Students may use the school telephone to call home if necessary. The office staff will deliver messages to students; if you or your child must have a conversation, this should take place during a break or free time (unless an emergency).

If needed to facilitate pick up, students may use their phone with permission to call their family **during dismissal time only. Students may ask to call their family or person picking them up to expedite the process. Personal cell phones may only be used in the AC space.** Should there be a change in pick up as mentioned in the “Dismissal” section, a staff member must speak to the

family in order to release the student to someone unauthorized (not found on the Identification sheet). If a student uses a cell phone without permission, the phone will be taken by guides and the family must retrieve it at the end of the day

Nature's Way Montessori School Handbook 2026-2027

Adolescent Community Supplement

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Welcome to the Nature's Way Adolescent Community!

This document is a supplement to the Nature's Way Montessori School Handbook (2026-2027) that provides information on unique aspects of the Adolescent Community. It is important to read both this supplement and the school handbook thoroughly. Our procedures have developed over the years to allow us to work together to provide a safe and supportive environment for our adolescent students. We value feedback from families - please reach out if you have questions about our handbook.

Diversity Statement

Montessori philosophy seeks to achieve peace and equity through education. In accordance with this goal, Nature's Way Montessori School provides a safe, supportive, and developmentally appropriate environment where we can learn together. We honor the value of a diverse community and welcome conversations that aid in understanding our humanity and the world we share. We understand diversity to be valuable and nurture awareness by welcoming people of differing races, ethnicities, cultures, nationalities, abilities, personalities, languages, socio-economic backgrounds, sexualities, gender identities and expressions, political beliefs, religions, and family structures.

Program Overview

"The school should become the place where the child may live in freedom, and this freedom must not be solely the intimate, spiritual liberty of internal growth. The entire organism of the child, from his physiological, vegetative part to his motor activity, ought to find in school the best conditions for development."

– Dr. Maria Montessori

The Adolescent Community staff is committed to Dr. Montessori's ideal of ensuring that the adolescent's needs and tendencies are satisfied appropriately through meaningful work. Whether through microeconomic activities, service in the community, or lessons in the classroom, the prepared environment of the Adolescent Community strives to facilitate adolescents' self-construction and formation of the personality while preparing them for entry into adult life and society.

As described in Dr. Montessori's book *From Childhood to Adolescence*, the "Plan of Study and Work" is both an overview of the program as well as an exploration of the kinds of work required by the adolescent.

There are also descriptions of policy and procedures critical to the overall function of the school, sample forms, and other information.

Mission Statement of the Adolescent Community

“There are two needs of the adolescent: for protection during the time of the difficult physical transition, and for an understanding of the society which he is about to enter to play his part as a human...”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Keeping this in mind, it is our mission to support the natural development of our adolescent students while providing them with a safe environment in which they can explore means of social and economic independence. We do this by using the land as a point of departure for community engagement, experiences of production and exchange, self-expression, cognitive formation, and preparation for adult life.

Vision of the Adolescent Community

Nature’s Way Montessori School will provide a rich environment rooted in the work of Maria Montessori, where our students can develop to their full potential and prepare to enter adult life. We strive to assist the development of the adolescent with the following:

- Supporting the natural human development of the adolescent
- Connecting the adolescent to the land through scientific and historic studies
- Providing opportunities to explore a variety of social and economic roles
- Engaging both the head and the hands in purposeful activity
- Stimulating valorization through meaningful work
- Assisting the adolescent to become independent
- Promoting the moral development of the adolescent
- Encouraging self-expression and critical thinking skills
- Fostering a lifelong love of learning
- Learning what it means to make a contribution

- Understanding interdependency with the rest of the world
- Adapting to a variety of work demands for the sake of others; the beginning of social consciousness
- Understanding work as a product of commerce necessary to community life and leading to a beginning view of economic independence and interdependence
- Learning the meaning of rules and their importance to harmonious living
- Learning to live in domestic relations with others; to work through human problems

from David J. Kahn (in part)—The Hershey Montessori Farm School

Land Partnership at Murphy Springs Farm

“Work in the country [has] wide social connotations of productiveness and earning power. The observation of nature has not only a side that is philosophical and scientific, it has also a side of social experiences that leads on to the observations of civilization and the life of men.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Nature’s Way Montessori School is excited to continue developing the “farm” component of our Plan of Study and Work. Thanks to the generosity of Kevin Murphy of Murphy Springs Farm, the school has been in a land partnership since 2014 for educational and agricultural work.

On the Nature’s Way Farm, students will use the space as a “limitless field for scientific and historic studies” as described by Maria Montessori. This includes the cultivation of crops for sale to the community for the microeconomy and for use in Science Occupations and Humanities classes. Students also use the farm as a learning environment for science topics, such as energy, genetics, and soil chemistry.

In addition to Murphy Springs Farm, the Southland Realty Group has given permission for the school to access its property, adjacent to the northern side of the nature preserve. White’s Creek runs through this land, which also contains sinkholes, small caves, and other forms of Karst topography. Students have used this space for a number of Science Occupations classes.

Adolescent Community Plan of Study and Work

“This means there is an opportunity to learn both academically and through actual experience what are the elements of social life.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Mathematics

“Mathematics are necessary because intelligence today is no longer natural but mathematical, and without development and education in mathematics it is impossible to understand or take any part in the special forms of progress characteristic of our times.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori observed that mathematical thinking is a gift to humans at birth, as all humans possess mathematical minds. Early adolescents are developing their sense of self and their place in the world. Our mathematics program provides a safe environment for students to accomplish these endeavors through nurturing confidence, giving opportunities to explore and apply concepts deeply, and developing a problem-solving style.

The mathematics program incorporates the theoretical and applied study of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and measurement and is designed to meet the standards expected for this age by the state while preserving the applied, hands-on approach a Montessori student is accustomed to. Students explore the relationships between abstract concepts and may apply them specifically in math projects. Additionally, students apply mathematics knowledge during other academic classes and the microeconomy.

The Montessori mathematics methodology includes:

- the option for mathematics projects that explore math through topics of interest to the students
- activity- and discovery-based learning
- the history of ideas
- the use of hands-on materials
- individually paced and individually designed work and lessons
- math seminars aimed at developing math communication and problem-solving skills

The Adolescent Community utilizes the mathematics curriculum from the Math Institute, designed by a Montessori math teacher for adolescents. It allows students to work at their own pace, practicing new concepts and reinforcing previous knowledge before moving on to further concepts. Students have the opportunity to move through up to 3 levels of Integrated Math as they are ready, though most students will move through Level 2. When needed,

assistance or extension activities are provided during individual or small-group workshops or tutorials.

Science Occupations

Science Occupations are project-based science classes in which students learn scientific concepts through the lens of a problem or issue that affects our school, community, or region. Emphasis is placed on the application of adult-like scientific practice in a variety of occupations in order to make an authentic and meaningful contribution.

Students at Nature’s Way have the opportunity to learn about core concept areas and have the opportunity to delve deeper into a related topic of interest to them. The courses also emphasize interdisciplinary skills that will be valuable in later educational settings such as note taking, conducting scientific experiments, working in teams, and scientific writing.

Science Occupations occur in four cycles. The course offerings incorporate several disciplines, such as studying chemistry through the soil, or genetics through the garden. Each cycle of study has a life, earth, or physical science as the core emphasis. Students at Nature’s Way will take four (4) life sciences, one (1) earth science, and three (3) physical sciences as shown in the table below. This structure also acknowledges the curricular requirements suggested by the Tennessee Department of Education.

Academic Year	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
A	Cell Biology (L)	Energy (P)	Chemistry (P)	Water (L)
B	Genetics and Reproduction (L)	Earth Studies (E)	Physics (P)	Sustainability (L)

Please note that academic years A and B will alternate.

Humanities

“The study of the history of mankind...should be treated as far as possible as a complete whole, from which special periods can be chosen for individual study.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

The Adolescent Community's Humanities curriculum spans the whole of human history each year. It tells the story of what it means to be human both thematically and chronologically, incorporating history, geography, literature, art, music, philosophy, and more. As students examine the creation of human culture throughout time, they are able to think critically about the past and work toward constructing their own selves for the future. Montessori concepts drive the curriculum and scope, as each study addresses the following key themes:

- History as a scholarly pursuit
- Self-expression through music, drama, and art
- Nature vs. supranature (humanity's alteration of the natural world for its benefit)
- Elements of production and exchange
- Discoveries, inventions, and explorations
- Migrations and invasions

The class also acknowledges Tennessee state social studies standards and addresses world and United States history accordingly. The Humanities curriculum is organized into four primary themes. Students receive key lessons on a given topic before engaging in individualized work. These themes are consistent for both academic years, with one year focusing on U.S history and the alternating year focusing on world history. For each theme, one or two topics may be available for any given cycle each year. These offerings are subject to change due to the needs and interests of the community.

Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
Early Agriculture	Classical Civilizations	Societies in Transition	Issues in Modern Life

Early Agriculture can include Egypt, Mesopotamia, Native Americans, the Maya, Indus Valley

Classical Civilizations can include the Aztec, the Inca, US Nationhood, Classical China, Classical Japan, Classical Rome, etc.

Societies in Transition can include U.S. Westward Expansion, the Middle Ages, Exploration and Colonization, U.S. Civil War, World War II, the Cold War, and World Religions

Issues in Modern Life can include the Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Era, climate change, immigration, global food and water issues, contemporary women's issues, and sustainability

Language Arts

"Actual writing is an external manifestation of an inner impulse. It is a pleasure that comes from carrying out a higher activity and not simply an exercise."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

In our Language Arts class, students learn fundamental concepts pertaining to the study of language, such as mechanics of writing and speech, composition, grammar, vocabulary, and more. Students explore literature in book groups and refine literary analysis techniques together, as well as partaking in independent reading throughout the year. Additionally, the class allows students to collaborate on projects related to current studies and share them with each other, while also exploring various modes of writing and researching.

	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3	Cycle 4
7th Grade	Rhetoric in Folklore	Rhetoric in Poetry	Rhetoric in Drama	Rhetoric in Southern Literature
8th Grade	Rhetoric	Poetry	Socio-linguistics	Creative Writing

Spanish

"In the past one language was enough, but today it is a social convention that education should include the ability to read and write correctly in several languages."

-Dr. Maria Montessori

All Nature's Way students engage in the study of Spanish, with the Adolescent Community working towards a practical use of the language. The theme-based class involves both group activities and individual work focusing on interpersonal, interpretive and presentational communication skills. Vocabulary and grammar topics are incorporated throughout. Students also examine themes covered in other classes through the lens of the Hispanic world, gaining a broader perspective of the people

who speak the language they are learning. In addition to fostering communicative competence, emphasis is placed on cultural understanding through the use of authentic texts, music and artifacts.

Mini-Cycle

During the Mini-Cycle, students complete a research project based on the topic of their choice. These projects are designed to match the skills, abilities, and interests of each student. There is an opportunity to do intermediate or advanced level projects.

Students work with their advisors and families to narrow down ideas and to pick a topic that is academically and developmentally appropriate. Each student is then responsible for conducting research, writing a research paper, and preparing visual aids to accompany their project. During the last week of the Mini-Cycle, students share what they have learned by presenting their research to the class. Families are invited and encouraged to attend the presentations.

Self-Expression Classes

The self-expression classes nurture the adolescent's tendency toward creative work and provide activity and variety in the weekly schedule. The classes run for approximately ten weeks in three sessions: one in fall, winter, and spring. Options include art, crafts, theater, music, physical education, writing, debate, and more. Students have the opportunity to choose self-expression classes based on their individual interests. Each class offered falls into one of the following categories: Musical, Physical, Creative, or Life Skills. Although students may express a preference for a specific class, they must take at least one class in each category over the course of their time in the AC.

Workshops

Workshops are a time for committee meetings, managerial work, class-related workshop intensives, specific instruction on particular topics, and microeconomy tasks. This work is a critical component of the curriculum and offers essential opportunities for community growth and individual contributions. Students are also able to plan and lead workshop sessions.

Committees

Students and adults form committees on an as-needed basis throughout the year to meet needs in the

community. Committees may work on AC guidelines, plan for an upcoming event, coordinate service outings, or accomplish some task for the school or greater Knoxville community.

Literature Seminar

Seminar is a chance for members of a group to share questions and insights about a text, ultimately leading to a deeper understanding of each other and the content. Students learn the proper procedures for active listening, building upon and appreciating others' ideas, and sharing ideas in a group setting. Formal seminar discussions occur as literature circles and are also scheduled on occasion in other academic classes.

Community Work and Care of the Environment

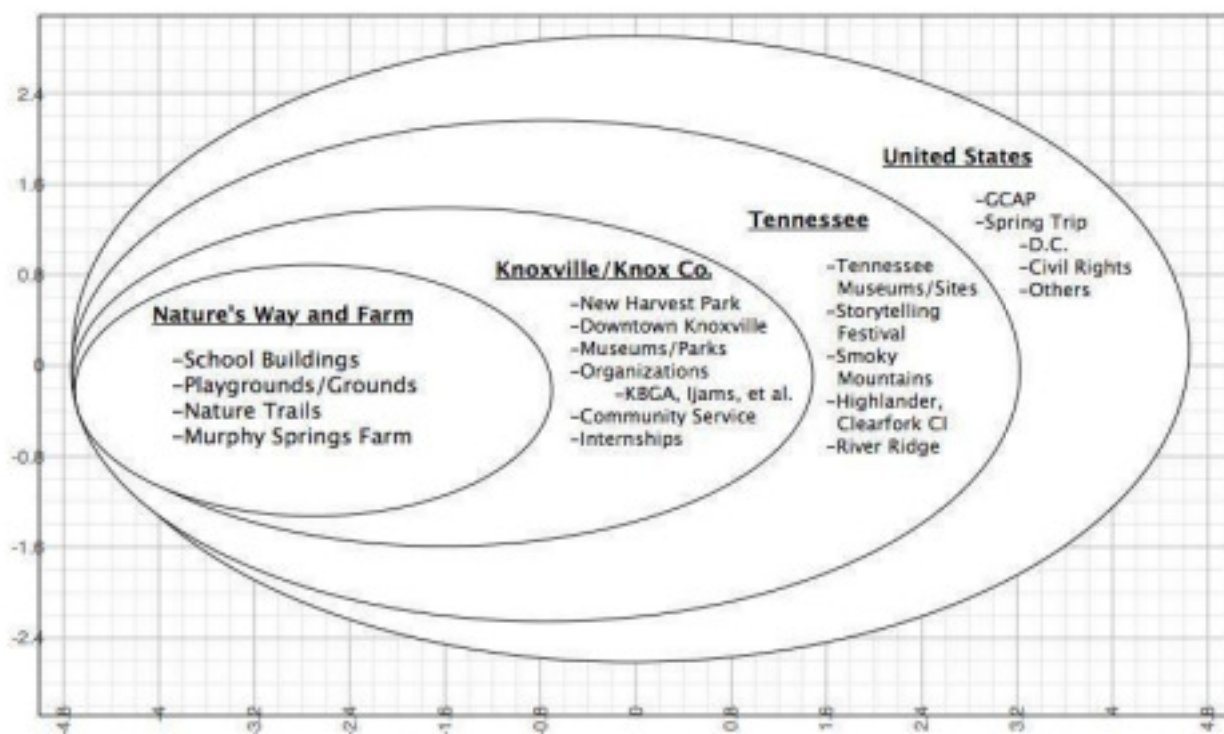
Adolescents have a developmental need to experience real, meaningful work in a wider social context. This involves both work of the head and the hand. Because of this need, manual work is an integral part of the Adolescent Community experience. Students learn directly that their contributions are essential to the successful functioning of the community.

While there is important work that needs to be addressed daily, time is also set aside for “Community Work” in order to take on larger projects. These initiatives are wide-ranging and include such things as building projects, canning vegetables, clearing trails, cleaning out the chicken coop, planting, cultivating, harvesting, making crafts, writing newsletter articles, baking, and more. Each afternoon all students contribute to the restoration of the environment, which is necessary for keeping the classroom spaces clean and orderly. The students rotate through different jobs in all spaces throughout the year. Guides assist and encourage these jobs to be done with care and attention to detail.

Community Service

Adolescents are involved in community service at Nature's Way and beyond. At school, students participate in a weekly community service program where they contribute to other classrooms and areas throughout the school. They work alongside guides to keep classrooms organized, to tutor younger students, and to help out with paperwork and class events. Students choose which environment they work in by applying for several community service positions within the school. They maintain the same weekly position throughout the year. Students also have the opportunity to plan and contribute to service work in the Knoxville area. These activities allow them to become

aware of their communities and the people in them, to feel valued for their services, and to work on a positive self-concept.



Examples of students' involvement in various communities.

Microeconomy

“The essential reform is this: to put adolescents on the road to achieving economic independence.”

-Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori thought it essential for adolescents to participate in experiences of production and exchange as they prepare to enter society as adults. We provide for this activity through the Microeconomy. All students take part in the real, adult-like work of maintaining the garden, crafting, and more. They also market and sell these products during afternoon pickup times and special events. Funds are generally re-invested into this aspect of the program or put towards enrichment opportunities as determined by the students.

In order to provide an economic experience that allows students to make real decisions and real contributions, the Adolescent Community Microeconomy exists separately from the overall school

budget. The students have a separate bank account with First Tennessee to handle real-life financial operations. Animal feed, seed for the garden, ingredients for products, and other materials and services necessary for the operation of the Microeconomy and its related businesses are paid for with sales of products made and produced on-site (as much as possible).

Observation and Evaluation

Advisory Program

Each student is assigned to an advisory guide. The advisory program offers each student and guide a special advisor/advisee relationship. The advisor is an advocate for the student in academic, behavioral, and interpersonal matters. The advisor is also responsible for monitoring the overall progress of advisees throughout the year and is the main contact person for the student, family, and staff.

Advisory meetings occur during each day of academic work, and may include large or small group activities or individual planning. Students use this time to work on organization, time management, character education, leadership skills, social development, and conflict resolution. Advisory meetings are also used to share stories, plan events, and make announcements. These activities focus on developing trusting relationships between students and guides in order to enhance each student's sense of belonging, as well as provide academic and social guidance and support.

Advisors will also conference with their advisees and their families throughout the year. All Nature's Way staff and students are asked to take responsibility for reporting any conflict with a student in the Adolescent Community to the advisor. This includes any inappropriate behavior, problems with peer interaction, or other situations that should be addressed. Issues can be reported by filling out and submitting a "Communication Form," emailing an advisor, or by scheduling a conference with staff. The advisor will review the report and work out an appropriate way for the student(s) to talk about possible solutions for the situation.

The advisor is the main contact person for students, parents, and staff. If students or families have questions, concerns, or need to share information, the student's advisor is the person to contact. Please notify the student's advisor and the office for early or late

dismissal. Also, please schedule conferences through the advisor. Nature's Way staff will direct any concerns about a student in the Adolescent Community to that student's advisor.

Organization

Organization is critical to the establishment of an ordered life. As the adolescent assumes more responsibility with emerging social roles, practice with organizational skills becomes increasingly important.

To develop this skill, students establish a plan to keep track of class assignments and compile their work into binders. Guides assist students with prioritizing, planning, and categorizing work if needed. Students should take time each day to organize, check their work plans, and restore their personal spaces.

Online Tracking of Assignments

Students, staff, and family members use Google Sheets for online record-keeping. This means that guides can track and record the status of work for each student on a rolling basis. Guides will indicate whether assignments are complete, incomplete, missing, or need to be remedied. Students and their family members can access the student's record sheets on Google and check the status of work at any time for all core classes.

In preparation for future learning environments, all 8th grade students receive grades. Assignment grades are posted on the Google Sheets assignment tracker, and final grades for each class are shared with families after each academic cycle. All AC guides adhere to the Knox County Schools grading system.

Homework

Students have scheduled times each day that they are expected to use wisely to work on assignments, conduct research, and obtain assistance. Papers and projects may sometimes require a student to spend time away from school conducting research, writing, studying, etc. It is reasonable for AC students to complete unfinished work and/or practice work at home. It may also be necessary to have weekend work. The time needed to complete work at home will vary from student to student based on individual study habits, skills, and abilities. When students organize their time well, they are better prepared for class, able to juggle outside activities with school work, and able to fulfill

obligations inside and outside of school.

It is important that students learn how to discipline themselves to work at home after school. This is a skill necessary for high school and future learning. Students who use their personal work time at school appropriately may not have much homework. If a student is coming home with a disproportionate amount of homework, families may want to schedule a conference to discuss the matter. Also, it is our expectation that families provide an appropriate time, place, atmosphere, and the supplies necessary to allow the student to complete high-quality work at home.

End-of-Cycle Evaluation

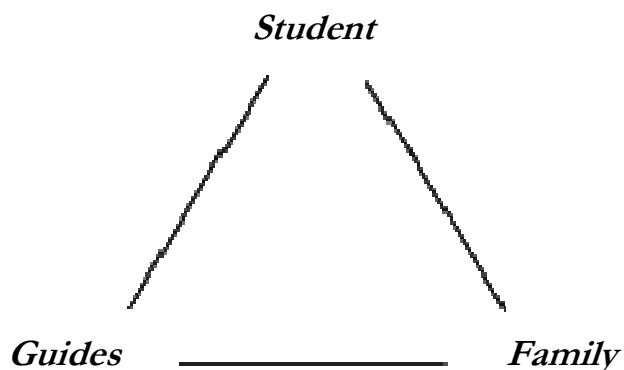
After the conclusion of each cycle, the AC staff will send home an Academic Summary evaluating your student's work based on the following categories: Engagement, Understanding Concepts, Skill Development, Work Management, and Overall Quality of Work. Evaluations use a 1-4 numerical system to indicate progress in specific areas.

The AC staff provides an this summary in addition to feedback on work as it is submitted and returned, assistance for student-led conferences, and more as ways to provide a clear picture of the student's development and progression. Guides are also available upon request for conferences to provide more qualitative feedback on student progress.

Family-School Partnership

Communication between Families and Guides

AC guides value the increasing independence of adolescent students and the essential support of the student's family members. Cooperation between the student, family members, and AC guides are necessary to ensure the student's success in their continued development.



With the help of families, AC guides strive to support students in taking increased responsibility for their learning and development. The AC guides work to establish a supportive learning environment at school. Likewise, it is important for family members to provide an environment at home in which students can focus on homework when needed, and are supported to come to school prepared each day.

Email is a valuable means for communication with guides. The school email address is adminteam@naureswaymontessori.com. The office will forward any email communication to an AC staff member; however, please feel free to contact the AC staff directly.

Gar Secrist

- Adolescent Community Program Coordinator
- Science and Humanities Guide
- Advisor

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Jimmy Waters

- Math and Science Guide
- Advisor

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Ian Hatcher

- Language Arts and Humanities Guide
- Advisor

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Isabel Zuniga

- Spanish Guide

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Lena Ayoub

- Farm Manager

lena.ayoub@natureswaymontessori.com

Please remember that the advisor is responsible for overseeing the overall progress of advisees throughout the year and is the main contact person for students, family, and staff. If you have questions, concerns, or need to share information, please contact your student's advisor unless there is a specific question for another staff member relating to their academic specialty. Any general questions about Adolescent Community events or programming should be directed to the Program Coordinator.

It is important that you also read the weekly "News You Need" emails from the office, as well as periodic AC Newsletters. Please ensure the school has a record of your current email address. If you are not already part of the Nature's Way email group, please send a message to natureswaymontessori@comcast.net to be added. Also, if your address has changed from last year, please send an email with the new address.

Conferences

New-Student Conferences: In September, during our first academic cycle, new students to the Adolescent Community meet at school with their parents / guardians and their advisor. The purpose of this meeting is to share strengths, challenges, and goals as the student adjusts to life in the AC.

Student-Led Conferences: Twice a year students lead short conferences with their parents / guardians and their advisor about their work. This is a great opportunity to hear student viewpoints and perspectives and to celebrate accomplishments. Students will select pieces of work or other projects to display and discuss with family members. The discussion also incorporates elements regarding goal-setting, planning, work ethic, engagement with work, and other related topics.

Additional Conferences: Family members or AC guides may contact one another to schedule additional conferences as needed. These meetings may involve the student unless family members or guides need to discuss issues privately.

Involvement at Nature's Way

There are many opportunities for family members be actively involved in the Adolescent Community. The staff strives to provide students with guest speakers; and family members are encouraged throughout the year to talk to students about their professions or interests as they relate to activities in the community. Adult family members may also provide job-shadowing or internship experiences in their occupation for our 8th grade students during our Career Exploration program in the spring. If you are interested and able to host a student at your place of employment, please reach out to Gar at gar.secrist@natureswaymontessori.com.

Adult family members are invited to provide transportation, plan special events, and chaperone field trips when appropriate. If driving or chaperoning, please respect the educational and social environment and understand that there are expectations that we have of the adults who are in the presence of these young people. **Each chaperone/driver will need to sign submit a copy of their driver's license and insurance to the office once each year.**

When adult family members volunteer to provide transportation, their own student may ride with them, but AC guides will determine the vehicle arrangements for the other students. Volunteer drivers should refrain from inviting students other than their own to ride with them. This helps us to build an inclusive community during our field trips.

AC Self-Expressions Classes by Family Members

Another opportunity for adult family members to be actively involved in the school is to lead Self Expressions classes for a small group of interested AC students. The goal of this program is to give our students opportunities to choose specific skills and interests to develop. Three times per year, we offer a selection of Self Expressions classes, and students choose the options they are most interested in exploring. Typically the classes involve a small group, usually 3 to 7 students.

We seek to offer a wide range of skills-focused classes, including but not limited to:

- Hobbies and skills such as cooking, woodworking, photography, or filmmaking
- Physical activities including sports, yoga, or martial arts
- Forms of artistic expression or craft making

Our Self Expressions classes typically run for about 10 sessions, one session per week. They take place on Wednesday mornings, and each session is an hour and fifteen minutes in length. We have two time slots to choose from: 8:45-10:00 or 10:15-11:30. If you or someone you know may be

interested in sharing a hobby or skill with AC students, please contact Gar at:

gar.secris@natureswaymontessori.com

Parent/guardian involvement in school life is essential for the success of the students at Nature's Way, and the staff is always grateful for your contributions!

Support for Families

Adolescents need more independence than elementary aged children, but they also need the guidance and support of adults.

It's easy to dismiss ten- to fifteen-year-olds as moody, baffling creatures. Yet, these years are perhaps the most critical time in human development, a juncture at which unmatched physical and intellectual growth, expanding creativity, emerging moral sensibilities, awakening sexuality, and maturing emotions converge. Early adolescence is a time when girls and boys may need the help of parents most—yet it's often a time when they are most reluctant to accept it. And it may be a parent's greatest opportunity to effect positive changes in a child's life.

-Laura Sessions Stepp, *Our Last Best Shot*

Raising early adolescents can be very challenging. Some family members might like more information on what is happening with their children and how they can continue to be a positive influence in their child's life. Family members are welcome to browse and check out the many books located in the library adjacent to the office.

Policies and Procedures

Attendance

Absences are an unavoidable part of school life. Please notify the school and your child's advisor when your child will be absent. Students who are sick need to remain at home until the condition improves. **If there is a planned absence, please provide as much advance notice as possible to the office and AC staff in advance. This will help us to better plan and support your student.**

Daily attendance, including timely arrival and dismissal, is very important for all students. Please schedule family trips to coincide with school vacations. Students who have missed school due to family vacations can fall behind, miss important concepts, or let down group members for group projects in progress. If time out of school cannot be avoided, please contact the Program Coordinator as soon as possible. By giving advance notice, guides can work with the student to plan strategies to help deal with the workload.

For all absences, it is the student's responsibility to ask about missing work, complete assignments that were missed, and meet with other students and guides regarding collaborative work. Family members should assist their children with planning and catching up on missed work, if required. Please give advance notice that you want to pick up assignments for an ill child, and guides or students will strive to compile this. Guides will work with the student to modify assignments should the need arise due to illness.

All absences should be excused. Please refer to the school's attendance policy for more details.

Scheduling Appointments

Due to the collaborative nature of our work, students often cannot make up for time missed at school. Therefore, we strongly discourage the scheduling of appointments during school hours. Please make every effort to schedule medical and dental appointments outside of that time. **If an appointment absolutely must be scheduled during school, please notify guides in advance to plan for the week.**

Likewise, if your student must be picked up early from school, please provide advanced notice to the office and AC guides. We often plan times for interested students to work in small groups on projects and committees in the afternoon according to their interests. Informing AC guides of early departure at least one day ahead helps us to ensure that your student can be involved in the community projects that interest them.

Arrival and Dismissal

AC students enter and depart from the AC deck at the end of the driveway. Please pull as far forward along the right side of the driveway as you can during arrival and dismissal. Refrain from using the parking lot at the end of the driveway for arrival or dismissal. There will be no walk-in drop-offs or dismissals. If you wish to speak with AC guides, please contact us to set up a time to meet.

Students who are not picked up promptly at 3:30 will be dismissed to Extended Day and brought to the dismissal area at the next scheduled dismissal time. Extended Day charges will apply.

Late arrivals must be scheduled in advance. Please contact the office and AC Program Coordinator with your arrival time, and check in at the office in-person to sign in your student. For early departures, please provide advanced notice to the office and AC Program Coordinator, and check in at the office to pick up and sign-out your student.

Medication and Health Concerns

Parents should notify staff of any major or minor health concerns. Also, parents should give any medication that their students needs while at school directly to a staff person. The medication must be placed in a zip-lock bag labeled with the student's name and a completed medication form.

Students may not keep medication in their possession (pocket, backpack, purse, etc.) while at school, regardless of the type of medication.

Prescribed medicines are given for various reasons, and common over-the-counter medications to help with allergies, colds, coughs, and other minor ailments on a regular basis or periodically often have side effects in children. Since observation is a critical component of a guide's role when working with students, it is important to know all medications taken by a child should a change in behavior occur.

If a child is on a regular medication that is designed to affect attention or mood, please notify the AC staff of any change in dosage and/or the timing of doses. Also, please ensure that the staff knows about any other medical conditions, including allergies. If you would like to give the AC staff permission to administer ibuprofen, acetaminophen, or other common medications, please indicate this on the designated form and submit it to the staff along with the medication.

For AC overnight trips, you will need to fill out a separate AC Overnight Medication Schedule form, indicating each time of the day that each medication will need to be taken during the trip. **Please communicate with AC guides well in advance of any medical conditions, dietary requirements, or other ways we can help support your student during their time away from home overnight.** Communicating these needs before our departure day allows AC guides to plan together to support your student.

Supplies

At the beginning of each year, the AC staff sends a list of necessary supplies to each family.

Students are responsible for purchasing and maintaining their own school supplies, including a water bottle, rain gear, work gloves, boots, and a hat for sun protection for work at the farm. These items should be labeled with their name. They should not depend on other class members or guides to provide pencils, pens, or other needed materials. We also ask that students bring a laptop to school for academic work and accessing some assignments online. They should have a charger for the laptop, also labeled with their name.

Projects are an integral part of the AC program. During every cycle, students will complete at least one project designed to further their understanding of the cycle's material. Often students choose to work on projects at home; however, if they plan to do the project at school, they need to be responsible for providing their own supplies (poster boards, adhesives, etc.).

Lunches, Snacks, and Drinks

In addition to their lunches, AC students also need to have snacks that can be easily eaten at the designated snack time and area. Students who stay after school especially need to bring extra snacks. It is also essential for students to keep a **personal water bottle** at school for use throughout the day; there is not a water fountain in the AC space, but there is access to filtered water. Additionally, students must provide their own silverware and napkin with their packed lunch. Soda, coffee and other caffeinated beverages may not be consumed at school. Under no circumstances should candy or fast food be brought to school by students or family members. Gum is also not permitted at school, unless families obtain permission for their student to use it as a tool for focus or necessary sensory input.

At this age, we strongly encourage students to be independent in packing their lunches and snacks for the day. Parents, however, should monitor their student's food and drink choices and reinforce the guidelines for nutritious snacks and lunches.

Dress Code

Adolescence is a sensitive time where students are developing self-esteem and an individual sense of style. Adolescents use clothing styles as a means of expressing identity, an important characteristic of the age.

With this said, the dress code for the Adolescent Community is based on practical needs for daily work and respect for each member of the community. As members of the Adolescent Community are often working outside in all types of weather, each guide and student should dress appropriately for this work. It is important that each member of the community take responsibility for making proper clothing choices. The school has provided guidelines (below) to assist families in making these choices.

Due to the sensitivity of this subject with adolescents, it is best for family members to monitor their student's dress choices and reinforce the dress code guidelines. Staff will relay violations of the dress code to families so that the family can discuss this together and assist the student with future clothing selections.

The following are guidelines for dressing for the school day:

- Students should refrain from wearing clothing or attire that inhibits or restricts participation in class activities or is a distraction to the learning environment.
- As students are often working outside in all types of weather, they must dress properly for these activities every day of school. Students are expected to keep a raincoat and rain boots on campus for outdoor work, and for use outdoors during free time and after school.
- All clothing must adequately cover undergarments in all situations, including when sitting on the floor or engaging in physical activity.
- Clothing should not contain offensive pictures or writing.
- Shoes may be worn in the AC space. If students choose not to wear shoes, they must have something on their feet while at school (socks, sandals, slippers, etc.).

Field Trips and Outings

The Adolescent Community program includes involvement in activities outside of school throughout the year. Field trips are scheduled throughout the course of the year to correspond to what is being studied in the classroom. While many trips are planned in advance, some are spontaneous in nature. These outings are local trips to secure supplies for community work or visit a community asset for class or committee work. Please review and submit the permission form for field trips and outings at the end of this handbook.

Students also spend time away from the school to help in the community and to participate in cultural events. These generally take place during the school day, but some unique opportunities may occasionally arise on nights and weekends. Community-building trips are also planned throughout the year, including the three-day overnight trips at the beginning and end of the school year.

Usually staff and sometimes adult family members of students will provide transportation for students in their personal vehicles. In some cases school buses or vans may be used for field trips.

Eighth Grade Year

The eighth grade year is a special time for Nature's Way students. For most of the eighth grade students, it marks the end of many years spent at our school. Because of this, we have several program components in place to aid in the transition to high school.

In the fall, the school staff hosts a meeting for families in order to share important information for the upcoming transition to high school. Guides are available to write letters of recommendation for students as needed. AC staff are available to work with families to make decisions about placement and to meet specific requirements for high schools.

Problem Solving and Positive Discipline

Adolescence is a critical time during which the brain is undergoing a period of tremendous growth and change, second only to that of the toddler years. This rapid change brings with it unique opportunities and challenges for the adolescent, particularly in the areas of social and emotional life. Just as they are busy exploring new concepts in history or literature, adolescents are also engaged in the important work of learning new lessons in civility, morality, and self-regulation.

Adolescents are working on defining themselves as they strive to understand the "rules" of adult society. Students are actively involved in running their community by using the Community Meeting agenda to discuss issues crucial to running the classroom. In Advisory Group meetings, students take part in social-emotional lessons designed to practice conflict resolution skills.

As adolescents grow socially and emotionally, conflict is a natural part of the process. When students encounter conflict, we encourage them to:

- Take responsibility for their actions and their words
- Go to the person with whom they have a problem
- Learn to solve their own problems

When students feel that they cannot handle a problem on their own, they are encouraged to ask a guide to help mediate the problem. This form of mediation involves a process using a neutral and impartial third person who walks parties through the conflict resolution procedure to resolve their dispute. It is a peaceful process intended to help disputants reach a win-win agreement. Students may use a Communication Form to request mediation or to report a problem that they are having with another member of the community. This is a tool that empowers students to take the first step in resolving a problem.

Responding to Disrespectful Behavior

To recognize the adolescent's need for increased independence, and to provide opportunities to balance increased freedom with increased responsibility, AC guides encourage and support students to reflect on and resolve personal, social, and academic challenges independently at school. However, parents and family members remain essential advocates and supporters for adolescent students. If students continue to experience challenges that they are unable to resolve independently, AC guides will communicate these challenges to families.

If a student engages in serious or recurring behavior that is inconsistent with our core value of respect, AC guides respond according to the following procedure:

- The student's advisor will meet with the student to provide them with the opportunity to share their needs. The advisor will then collaborate with the student to create an agreement to meet these needs while respecting the Adolescent Community and the student's personal academic growth.
- After reaching this agreement, AC guides will follow-up with the student about any behavior that remains inconsistent with the agreement. In this case, they will revisit the agreement with the student and guide them in re-evaluating the situation.
- If a student remains unable to fulfill their agreement responsibly, AC guides will contact the family. Guides will also communicate to the family directly if their student engages in an incident of

significantly disrespectful behavior toward the community. The goal of these communications is to give families the opportunity to advocate for their student's needs while helping the student to participate in the Adolescent Community respectfully and responsibly. We ask that parents or family members discuss the situation with their student and confirm to AC guides that a conversation has taken place.

- If behavior challenges persist, AC guides will schedule a conference with the student and their parents or family members. This conference provides guides, family members, and the student an opportunity to come to an agreement on how to proceed.

While we believe that students benefit most by being present in the classroom, in rare cases a student may be asked to leave school for the day or longer, and in extreme cases, permanently. This may occur if the behavior occurs frequently, is not resolved in a timely manner, and/or reaches an intensity that is a danger to the student, others, or the environment.

Academic Expectations

Academic Integrity

At Nature's Way Montessori School, we value and expect academic integrity, which we define as a commitment from guides and students to demonstrate moral and honest behavior in regards to academics; therefore, any cheating or plagiarizing (attempts to pass off another's work as one's own) is unacceptable.

Computers and Technology

The Adolescent Community is fortunate to have access to a variety of technology tools including computers, laptops, the Internet, graphing calculators, radio, DVD players, etc. Students should use these items responsibly and only for schoolwork. Guides reserve the right to view technology tools at any time to ensure that guidelines are being followed.

Students may use the Internet to research class projects and assignments. **They cannot use computers to access social media, play games, or for other personal projects without permission.** Students are expected to follow the technology guidelines posted in the Adolescent Community and in this document, including the provisions for student-owned laptops. Students must have their own laptops and chargers for work every day. They may use their laptops in open

work cycle and for activities in classes for which guides approve computer use. **Students must use their own computers** for work unless given permission by a guide to use the classroom computer, which is also only available for assigned academic or community work.

Adolescent Community students also have access to a digital camera that can be used for school work with permission. Students must have permission before bringing a personal camera or video camera to school or to use smart phones as recorders/cameras.

Artificial Intelligence

The Adolescent Community academic curriculum emphasizes the development of research and writing skills essential to students' future academic careers and their ability to communicate as adults. The work of the AC includes evaluating the reliability of sources of information, thinking critically about research findings, and learning to synthesize and communicate information effectively. Academic projects allow students to practice these skills while expressing themselves creatively.

Young people now have access to online artificial intelligence (AI) tools that can present information and generate images or written passages. These tools can be powerful and, with proper validation of their output, can produce useful outcomes. However, research into the use of these tools suggests that AI can undermine the engagement, retention, and critical thinking skills associated with learning in young students.

Adolescence is an important time for students to develop the ability to think critically about information and learn to communicate it with originality and creativity. To support the growth of these skills in our students, AI tools may not be used to generate information, images, or written content for any academic or community work for school purposes.

Computer Guidelines

- Use computers responsibly and only for school work.
- Computers must remain silent, unless the student has permission from a guide.
- Computers are only available when approved by a guide.
- Liquids may not be placed at the same table as a computer.
- Computers may only be used indoors.
- Students work individually at their own computers, unless they have permission from a guide to do

group work.

- Due to limited charging spaces, students are expected to charge their computers before bringing them in the morning. Computers may not be charged during classes. During Open Work Cycle, students may charge computers if their charging cable does not cross the floor where others may walk.
- Computers must be used according to all instructions given by guides.
- With permission from guides, students may use wired headphones to listen to audio relating school projects, or to listen to music approved by their parents / guardians for the purpose of focusing during work time. Wireless headphones may not be used, and music may not be shared between students.

To support the responsible use of computers for academic purposes, guides will redirect student misuse of technology. If a student uses their technology in a way that deviates from the above guidelines, guides may ask students to choose work at school that does not require a computer for a 24-hour period. Guides will contact families if a student repeatedly misuses technology, or needs to complete computer work at home if they were unable to do so responsibly at school.

Cell Phone and Smart Device Guidelines

Cell phones, smart phones, or smart watches are not necessary for any school activities. Since these items may distract from the learning experience, **students may not use phones or smart watches at school without special permission. If a student needs to carry a cell phone or smart watch, it must be turned off and stored out-of-sight in a backpack, purse, or cubby while at school during the day.**

Please try to work out personal details with your child during non-school time and avoid making telephone calls or texts directly to your child during the school day. Instead, please call the school if you need to talk to your child. Students may use the school telephone to call home if necessary. The office staff will deliver messages to students; if you or your child must have a conversation, this should take place during a break or free time (unless an emergency).

If needed to facilitate pick up, students may use their phone with permission to call their family **during dismissal time only. Students may ask to call their family or person picking them up to expedite the process. Personal cell phones may only be used in the AC space.** Should there be a change in pick up as mentioned in the “Dismissal” section, a staff member must speak to the

family in order to release the student to someone unauthorized (not found on the Identification sheet). If a student uses a cell phone without permission, the phone will be taken by guides and the family must retrieve it at the end of the day