

# BRILLIANT STAR MONTESSORI SCHOOL

## PARENT HANDBOOK



## Welcome to Brilliant Star

We warmly welcome you and your family to Brilliant Star. The school was founded in the beginning of 2000. It has quickly grown from a single Toddler class in a commercial space, to an expansive campus encompassing a Toddler program, two Primary classrooms, and a Lower and Upper Elementary program. This short period of time has been filled with challenges and successes, and there are surely more to come as we work together to build an amazing school.

Brilliant Star updates this Parent Handbook annually. We value your input. Please let us know if you see need for revision or if you request any additional information.

We look forward to our growing partnership in the year ahead!

## The Vision of Brilliant Star

Brilliant Star has an ambitious long-range vision. Our goal is to not only become a truly world-class school, but to become a model for educational excellence, character training, and family partnership. Students at Brilliant Star have the opportunity to participate in an internationally renowned curriculum.

Based on the unique character of the school and the Montessori educational methods, enrollment has steadily grown and the school has expanded into the elementary grades. To ensure the educational leadership needed to realize its vision, the school is dedicated to the pedagogical approach defined by the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) and the American Montessori Society (AMS) the two most widely recognized organizations that certify such schools and teachers worldwide.

Brilliant Star's goal is to give its students an education that will prepare them to succeed both in future academic institutions and in life. Brilliant Star emphasizes hands-on discovery-based learning. The program provides an exceptional standard of excellence, where students are challenged to compete against themselves, rather than each other.

At Brilliant Star there is a commitment to a close partnership between home and school, to academic accountability, and to an innovative program that leads students to develop extraordinary levels of personal responsibility, independence, and self-confidence.

Today the sense of transformation vibrates through the campus; evidence of the commitment Brilliant Star has to create something of lasting value for our children and the community.

## **Our Vision Statement**

The activities of any school take place in an environment that is suffused with a particular vision of the world, the family, the child, the parent, the teacher, and the role of education. The ultimate goal of education is not only the advancement of the individual, but more importantly the betterment of humanity. Brilliant Star is animated by the vision that:

*Universal peace and unity is the inevitable goal towards which we strive.*

*The Family* is the bedrock of human society. The peace and unity of society is dependent upon the peace and unity of the family.

*The Child* is the promise and guarantee of the future. Children bear the seeds of the character of future society and are in need of guidance and training.

*The Parent* is the primary educator of the child. Parents exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create.

*The Teacher* is a model and a guide. The role of the teacher is to bring forth from the child whatever perfections and capacities are within, assisting the child to reach their highest level of achievement.

*Education* is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence. Education is crucial to the realization of true human potential and to enabling the individual to render service to the world of humanity.

## **Our Mission Statement**

The mission of Brilliant Star is to provide an environment that will help children develop four key qualities:

- Global understanding. We recognize that the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is one of increasing interdependence among peoples and nations of the world. Our children will be comfortable as “world citizens”, with a global perspective and understanding of issues. They will be free from prejudices of race, national origin, ethnicity, language, economic status and religion. They will recognize the equality of the sexes, and will celebrate the diversity of the world’s peoples and cultures. Our children will be promoters of unity.
- Service to humanity. We recognize that meaning and happiness come from selfless service to others. Our children will strive to find ways to serve others – their families, their communities, and humanity as a whole.

- Exemplary Character. We recognize that ultimately, the strength of ones character is the essence of ones self. Character is that set of virtues that are developed in an individual. Our children will develop, foremost amongst their virtues, truthfulness, trustworthiness, kindness, courtesy, compassion, confidence, joyfulness and humility. They will be emotionally and spiritually balanced individuals.
- Creative minds. The creative mind is one that can bring knowledge to bear on new situations and challenges. To this end, our children will be well versed in the branches of knowledge, with emphasis on mathematics, literature, science, history and arts. They will learn to independently investigate reality, to seek intelligently, to discover things for themselves, and to depend upon their own reason and judgment. They will practice applying this body of knowledge and this set of skills to the challenges around them, and to use their minds to become agents of meaningful change in their communities.

## The Board of Trustees

Brilliant Star is a non-profit school governed by a Board of Trustees. The primary functions of the Board are (1) to establish the school’s institutional mission and define the fundamental objectives and core values, (2) to establish policies under which the school will operate, (3) to select a school leader who will translate the school’s mission and objectives into day-to-day operation, (4) to oversee the on-going operation of the school within board policy and government regulations, and (5) to look to the future and plan for long-term institutional growth and development.  
Current Board: Nick Brennfleck (President) Richard Sikkel (Treasurer), Irene Park (Secretary), Nancy Gottfried (Member), Lindsay Davis (Teacher Rep)

## Administrative Structure

Brilliant Star has established an administrative structure to better meet the needs of its children, families and staff. The Board of Trustees, while establishing the overall direction of the school, works closely with the school Principal, who is involved with the daily operations of the school. The primary role of the Principal is to articulate the vision and mission of the school, to provide academic leadership, take leadership in the admissions and recruitment process, build community among students and families, recruit and guide faculty members and staff, oversee the financial health of the school, serve as the school’s primary spokesperson to the larger community, and lead the process of internal self-evaluation and long-term planning.

The Principal works with various individuals and committees to execute his/her responsibilities. The Administrative Office and its staff exist to assist the Principal efficiently and successfully fulfill his/her duties and responsibilities.

## Statement of Non-Discrimination

Brilliant Star School is committed to the principle of equal opportunity in education and employment. The School does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, veteran status, ancestry, or national or ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, employment policies, scholarship and loan programs, and other School administered programs and activities.

## Basic Elements of the Curriculum

### **The Classroom**

You will not find rows of desks in our classrooms at Brilliant Star. The Brilliant Star learning environment is set up to facilitate student discussion and stimulate collaborative learning. One glance and it is clear that our children feel comfortable and at home.

Students will typically be found scattered around the classroom, working alone or with a few others. They will tend to become so involved in their work that we cannot help but be tremendously impressed by the peaceful atmosphere.

It may take a moment to spot the teachers within the classrooms. They will be found working with one or more children at a time, advising, presenting a new lesson, or quietly observing the class at work.

Specific characteristics associated with the child's interests and abilities can be seen at each plane of development. A school carefully designed to meet the needs and interests of the child will work more effectively because it is consistent with basic principles of psychology. Rather than fight the laws of nature, we "follow the child" and allow our children to show us how to facilitate the development of their human potential. Our goal is to help each child develop their own unique gifts and capacities to serve humanity.

This focus on the "whole child" has led Brilliant Star to develop a very different sort of school from the conventional adult-centered classroom.

The classroom is not the domain of the adults in charge, but rather a carefully prepared environment designed to facilitate the development of the children's independence and sense of personal empowerment.

This is a true community of children. They move freely within the room and between classrooms selecting work that captures their interest, rather than passively participating in lessons and projects selected by the teacher.

In a very real sense, even the very youngest students at Brilliant Star take care of their own child-sized environment. When they are hungry, they prepare their own snack and drink. When something spills, they help each other carefully clean things up. Parents are often amazed to see small children in Brilliant Star's classrooms cut raw fruits and vegetables, sweep and dust, carry pitchers of water, and pour liquids with barely a drop spilled.

The children normally go about their work so calmly and purposely that it is clear to even the casual observer that this is *their* environment. The classrooms are commonly referred to as "prepared environments." This name reflects the care and attention that is given to creating a learning environment that will reinforce the children's independence and intellectual development.

This carries over into the Elementary program, where the children care for their own "learning laboratory," the classroom.

### **Respect, Intelligence, and Independence**

We know that even young children are full and complete individuals in their own right. They deserve to be treated with the full and sincere respect that we would extend to their parents. Respect breeds respect and creates an atmosphere within which learning is tremendously facilitated.

Intelligence is not fixed at birth, nor is the human potential anywhere near as limited as it sometimes seems in conventional education.

Success in school is directly tied to the degree to which children believe that they are capable and independent human beings. If they knew the words, even very young children would say, "Help me learn to do it for my self."

By allowing children to develop a meaningful degree of independence and self-discipline, Brilliant Star sets a pattern for a lifetime of good work habits and a sense of responsibility. Students take pride in doing things for themselves carefully and well.

### **Learning to Collaborate and to Independently Investigate Reality**

Our program is designed to help each of our students discover and develop his unique talents and capacities.

We treat each as a unique individual learner. We know that no two students will learn at the same pace, nor will they necessarily learn best from the same teaching methods, and we are flexible and creative in addressing each student as a unique individual.

At Brilliant Star, students learn to collaborate with one another in the process of education rather than compete against each other. Our students discover their own innate abilities and develop a strong sense of independence, self-confidence, and self-discipline.

In an atmosphere in which children are given the freedom to work through the curriculum as quickly as they wish and compete only against themselves, they learn not to be afraid of making mistakes. They quickly find that few things in life come easily, and they can try again without fear of embarrassment.

One way of thinking about the difference between our approach and one that is more conventional is to consider that while learning the right answers may get our children through school, learning how to become life-long independent learners will take them anywhere! Our children are learning to think, observe, and reflect; not memorize and quickly forget.

Rather than present students with loads of right answers, their teachers ask the right questions and lead the children to discover the answers for themselves. Learning becomes its own reward, and each success fuels the desire to discover even more.

Elementary students at Brilliant Star are encouraged to do their own research, analyze what they have found, and come to their own conclusions.

The teachers encourage our children to think for themselves and become actively engaged in the learning process.

### **Mastery, Freedom of Movement and Independently Chosen Work**

One of the fundamental tenants of our curriculum is that given the opportunity, each child has the potential for mastery of nearly all subjects to which he is exposed. Conventional education greatly underestimates the potential of the child. We recognize that one of the basic human needs is the drive for self-perfection. Children will choose work that fulfills particular needs, and set out to achieve perfection. At Brilliant Star, the students are free to move about, working alone or with others at will. They may select any activity that they have been presented and they may work with it as long as they wish, so long as they do not disturb anyone or damage anything, and so long as they respectfully return it to its place. They may return to activities as often as they wish, and it is through repeating the activities that they achieve mastery. Part of the teacher's role is to spark the child's interest in areas of the curriculum towards which they may not naturally be inclined, and to guide the child towards mastery in all areas.

### **The Integrated Curriculum**

Classrooms at Brilliant Star are organized into several curriculum areas, which include language arts (reading, literature, grammar, creative writing, spelling, and handwriting), mathematics and geometry, every day living skills, sensory awareness exercises and puzzles, geography, history, science, art, music, and movement. Most rooms will include a classroom library. Each area is made up of one or more shelf units, cabinets, and display tables with a wide variety of materials on open display ready for use as the children select them.

Brilliant Star's curriculum is organized into a spiral of integrated studies, rather than a conventional model in which the curriculum is compartmentalized into separate subjects,

with given topics considered only once at a specific grade level. In the early years, lessons are introduced simply and concretely and are reintroduced several times over succeeding years at increasing degrees of abstraction and complexity.

The course of study uses an integrated thematic approach that ties the separate disciplines of the curriculum together into studies of the physical universe, the world of nature, and the human experience.

Literature, the arts, history, social issues, science and the study of technology all complement one another. This integrated approach is one of Brilliant Star's great strengths.

Although this integrated approach takes place at all levels, it is more easily seen at the elementary level. The integrated approach is one of its fundamental features. As an example, when students study Africa in world history, they will also read African folk tales in world literature, create African masks and make African block print tee-shirts in art, learn Swahili songs in music, and make hieroglyphic calendars in math, as well as study African animals in zoology. And all of this will take place seamlessly.

The same is true in our science curriculum, where principles of physics, chemistry, the earth sciences, botany, and zoology are woven together. At the Primary and Elementary levels we place far greater emphasis on the sciences in general than is common in most conventional curriculums.

### **Second Languages**

Second languages are taught to children at an early age in the same way they learn their first language – through immersion. One of the functions of the classroom Assistant is to interact with the children using a second language. Mandarin is Brilliant Star's second language. Mandarin is the most widely used language in the world, spoken by more than one-fourth of the planet's peoples. It is recognized as a language of increasing importance in the coming decades.

(While we use the phrase "second language", we also recognize that many of the children at Brilliant Star already speak two languages.)

### **Typical Class Size**

At the Toddler level, the class size is typically twelve to fourteen children. At the Primary and Elementary levels, the class size is twenty to twenty-five children representing a three-year age span. All classes are typically taught by an AMI/AMS certified teacher and an assistant.

Primary and Elementary parents often wonder if it would not be better to organize classes into smaller groups, but there is actually a great deal of research, thought, and successful experience behind this particular model. The key is to remember that in such child-centered classrooms, the teacher is neither the focus of attention nor the sole source of instruction. The children are learning on their own, by independent discovery and from



each other, as well as through lessons presented by the teacher, and through the specially designed materials.

This approach allows the children to explore and learn independently as much as possible. The stimulation of older children and the encouragement of their peers fuel this process. All so often the best teacher of a four-year-old is an older child rather than an adult. Children learn from one another. We create classes of twenty-five to thirty-five to ensure that each child will have enough classmates of the same sex and age group, as well as the stimulation of the older children.

### **A Three-Year Age Span**

At the Primary and Elementary levels, Brilliant Star's classes are organized to encompass a three year age span, which allows younger student to experience the daily stimulation of older role models, who in turn blossom in the responsibilities of leadership. Students not only learn "with" each other, but "from" each other.

Some parents worry that having younger children in the same class as older ones will leave one group or the other short changed. They fear that the younger children will absorb the teachers' time and attention, or that the importance of covering the "kindergarten" curriculum for the five-year-olds will prevent teachers from giving the three and four-year-olds the emotional support and stimulation that they need. Both concerns are understandable, and easily addressed.

Working in one class for two or three years allows students to develop a strong sense of community with their classmates and teachers. The age range also allows accelerated learners the stimulation of intellectual peers, without requiring that they skip a grade and feel emotionally out of place.

Each class is an essentially stable community, with only the older third moving on to the next level each year. At each level within Brilliant Star, the curriculum and methods are logical and consistent extensions of what has come before.

### **Meeting the Needs of So Many Different Children**

Brilliant Star teachers play a very different role from those played by conventionally trained educators. While the stern disciplinarians of the past may be an endangered species, many teachers today remain focused on maintaining order and on covering a pre-defined curriculum that is not necessarily tailored to the needs of the individual child. Most see their role as dispensing facts and skills to complacent students.

The role of the teachers at Brilliant Star is that of facilitators and guides. The teacher is usually not the center of attention and will not normally spend much time working with the whole class at once. Her role centers on reviewing the progress and needs of each individual child on a daily basis, and preparing and organizing appropriate learning experiences to meet the needs and interests of each child in the class.

The teachers usually present a lesson to one or more children at a time in a quick, efficient presentation. The objective is to intrigue the children so that they will come back on their own to work with the materials. Lessons center around clear and simple information that is necessary for the children to be able to do the work on their own.

The teachers closely monitor their students' progress, keeping the level of challenge high. Because they come to know the children so well, the teachers at Brilliant Star can use special materials for individual needs to enrich the curriculum and provide alternate avenues for accomplishment and success.

### **The Classroom Materials – From the Concrete to the Abstract**

The basis of our approach is the simple observation that children learn most effectively through direct experience and the process of investigation and discovery. In her studies of children's learning, Dr. Maria Montessori noted that most children do not learn by memorizing what they hear from their teachers or read in a text, but rather from concrete experience and direct interaction with the environment. Children need to manipulate and explore everything that catches their interest.

This led Montessori to emphasize the overriding importance of concrete learning apparatus and to the development of the materials for mathematics, sensory development, language, science, history and geography that fill the classrooms.

The learning materials are not the method itself, but rather tools that we use to stimulate the child into logical thought and discovery. They are provocative and simple, each carefully designed to appeal to children at a given level of development.

Each material isolates and teaches one thing or is used to present one skill at a time, as the child is ready. Montessori carefully analyzed the skills and concepts involved in each subject and noted the sequence in which children most easily master them.

To facilitate the prepared order of the environment, the teacher arranges the materials on the shelf following their sequence in the curriculum flowchart. The materials are displayed on low open shelves that are easily accessible to even the youngest children. They are arranged to provide maximum appeal without clutter. Each has a specific place on the shelves, arranged from the upper-left-hand corner in sequence to the lower right. Materials are always arranged in sequence, from the most simple to the most complex, and from the most concrete to those that are the most abstract.

At the Elementary level, the classroom is comparable to a working laboratory, in which the child, like a scientist in her lab, collects all she needs to carry out her work. There is a constant interplay at this level between the concrete and the abstract.

**Preparing Tomorrow's Creative Thinkers Today**

In a world of rapid change and new discoveries, we can only guess the skills our children will need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now more than ever, the essential lesson is learning how to learn.

The most important years in our children's education are not high school and college, but, instead, their first twelve years of life. This is when their sense of global understanding, their character and self-image, their basic skills and knowledge, and their appreciation for the diverse cultures and arts of the world are formed.

Brilliant Star offers our children a world-class education, along with an education of the heart, which nurtures truthfulness, trustworthiness, kindness, courtesy, compassion, self-confidence, joyfulness and humility.

It offers them the most challenging academic program to which they can aspire, in a course of study that includes creative writing, unified mathematics, geometry, algebra, history, geography, economics, philosophy and ethics, botany and zoology, the physical sciences, foreign language study, art, music, dance and physical education.

We can see our children as they truly come to love learning and begin to discover their true potential as young men and women. Brilliant Star's goal is to nurture our children's sense of unity with all the world's peoples, their spirit of service to others, the strength of their characters and the creativity of minds.

Granted, this lies beyond the scope of conventional education, but then Brilliant Star has set out to become a rather distinguished school.

As families, we come to Brilliant Star to give our children an outstanding preparation for life.

## Section 2: Everyday Life at Brilliant Star

### Hours – Arrival and Dismissal

#### **Program Hours:**

Morning Toddler Program:	8:00 – 11:00 or 1:00
Toddler Full Day Program	8:00 – 3:00
Primary Half-Day Program:	8:00 – 11:15 or 1:00
Primary Full Day Program:	8:00 – 3:00
Elementary Full Day Program:	8:00 – 3:00

**Morning Arrival:** All students are due in class by the above arrival times. The school assigns staff to greet children as they arrive and to assist younger children in getting to class. Please do not drop off your child more than 10 minutes early.

**Late Arrival:** When arriving 15 minutes or more late, children must check into the school office. This is important for two reasons. First, it is very distracting to the class to have children enter the classroom after class has begun. Secondly, checking into the office helps the child realize that they are late, and helps to develop courtesy and responsibility.

**Picking your child up early:** Students will be expected to stay until class is dismissed. Naturally, there will be occasions when you will need to take your child out of school early for a doctor's appointment or similar obligation. To ensure that your child will be ready, please send a note to the teachers letting them know the time that you will be picking her up and the reason you will be picking her up early.

### The First Days of Class

Initially, it can be difficult for parents and children to separate at the beginning of the school year, and even after holidays. If this is your child's first year at Brilliant Star, we encourage you to visit the campus frequently before school to allow your child to become familiar with the new setting so that transitioning into Brilliant Star will be smooth and joyous. Come have a picnic one weekend. Walk the grounds. Be reassuring as you talk with your child about her new school. There will be an Open House for parents before school starts so that they can become familiar with the routines. There will be day for new students to visit the classroom and meet their new teachers before school starts.

As the developmental needs and characteristics of Toddler, Primary and Elementary children differ greatly, so do their environments. Accordingly, the procedures for the first days of school differ between these environments.

For Toddlers, parents are encouraged to come into the classroom and stay until their child is feeling comfortable. Parents transition themselves out of the classroom over a period of time that varies in length from child to child. Parents will be given guidelines on how to make this a smoother transition.

For Primary students we have found that a short and positive good-bye is easiest for the child. The prolonged or lingering good-bye often makes the separation more difficult. It is very important to reassure him about where you will be during the day, and by what time you will pick him up. The teachers are wonderful in helping children through these situations.

For Elementary students, during the first week they may be walked to the classroom door by their parents if they prefer. After the first week of school, all Elementary students should be dropped off at the front gate and make their way to the classroom without their parents.

### Attendance & Reporting Absences

All Brilliant Star students, even our youngest, are expected to attend school on a daily basis, arriving at the designated arrival times, before the start of class.

Students are expected to be in class by the start time and to be present in class for the full session. Late arrival is disruptive and inconsiderate to the rest of the class, and nothing can be more disruptive to a child's education than irregular attendance. Consistency and routine are important to every child's development, but they are especially important for toddlers, primary and elementary students.

We depend on your family's full support in this area. If we find that your child is arriving late more than three times in a month, we will set up a meeting to discuss a solution.

Please call the school in the morning on any days your child is sick or will be missing school. We appreciate calls made before 8:30 am to notify the teacher.

Although our program is individualized, it still depends upon consistency and continuous progress. Every time a child misses school for whatever reason there is a period of readjustment as she tries to get back into the routine of her work. The longer the absence, or when a child consistently misses a day or two of school here and there, the more detrimental it becomes to his educational development. It is understandable that every once in a while we all love to take a little vacation from school. While we are fairly understanding and supportive, it is still important that you keep your child's absences from school to a minimum.

Whenever your child needs to be excused early from school, please send in a note to the teachers indicating the reason for the early dismissal and the time when you will want them to be excused from class.

## Tropical Storms and Typhoons

In keeping with standards in the CNMI, school will close when we enter tropical storm Condition 1 or typhoon Condition 1. This is in keeping with the standards of the CNMI government. Parents will need to come and pick up their children early if we enter Condition 1 prior to the end of the school day. The early pick-up will be announced via email and social media post.

Parents will be informed as to when school is resuming by the following methods:

1. A message will be placed on the answering machine at school stating the date of the announcement and whether school will be in session that day.
2. Emails and posting on social media.
3. Parents who cannot be contacted by telephone due to power or phone service being down, or for other reasons, will be encouraged to check the answering machine each day for announcements.

### Some Definitions

Condition 1 – Arrival expected within 12 hours

Condition 2 – Arrival expected within 24 hours

Condition 3 – Arrival expected within 48 hours

Condition 4 – Arrival expected within 72 hours

Tropical Storm:	Maximum sustained winds $\geq$ 40 mph
Typhoon:	Maximum sustained winds $\geq$ 75 mph
Super typhoon:	Maximum sustained winds $\geq$ 150 mph

## Cartoons, Superheroes & Fantasy Characters

Children at a young age are naturally inclined towards discovering reality. In fact, all things are reality for the young child, and they have difficulty distinguishing between what we adults would call "reality" versus "fantasy".

Many educators are now beginning to see that the "fantasy" that we provide to children through cartoons, superheroes and other fantasy characters, are an adult imposition on the child's mind. That is, the child would not typically create such things on their own. If you watch your child, when they participate in "pretend" play, you will find that they spontaneously recreate reality. The subject of their play is the events in their day, their parents' day, and subjects from the world around them. Rarely will they spontaneously create fantasy characters.

Imagination is an important quality of the mind to nurture. We define imagination as the ability to create mental images. Truth and reality are the basis from which clear images

can be made. Imagination is the power of the mind to venture beyond what is clear and concrete. Fantasy and imagination are two separate things. Imagination is when the mind is used to create from the basis of reality.

Scientific progress is possible because our imagination has conceived something based in the intellect but not yet in reality. Our teachers make every effort for the children to have an attachment to reality so that imagination can take flight. We often see the use of imagination in children under the age of six, yet their natural work and their primary task at this age is discovering reality.

Reality is full of wonder -- it's the first time the child is seeing it. And, he tends to want more and more. The child does not need untruth and fantasy. We help the child by not hindering his perception of reality.

The most prevalent forms of fantasy that our children are exposed to are cartoons and superheroes. You may have noticed that many of these characters rely heavily on aggression and violence to solve problems. If your child is watching cartoons, you may wish to watch one with her, just to get an idea of how many acts of violence she is seeing in these cartoons.

Brilliant Star, especially from birth to six years of age, emphasizes gaining an understanding of reality. Furthermore, the underpinnings of all of our efforts to use education as a tool for establishing peace. Montessori education discourages introducing adult created fantasy themes into the child's world.

These are some of the reasons that schools such as Brilliant Star ask that children not be sent to school with any items, such as clothing, shoes, backpacks, or lunchboxes with cartoons, superheroes, fantasy characters or violent themes on them.

### Dress Code

Brilliant Star has adopted a set of standard school uniforms. Uniforms have been adopted for several reasons. Uniforms help ensure that each child feels comfortable with what they are wearing in relation to their classmates. This becomes even more important as the economic diversity of the school community increases. Uniforms ensure that appropriate attire is worn to school. They also simplify preparing for school each day, and also eliminate many of the distractions associated with choosing clothing, which become particularly more acute as children grow older. Uniforms help children identify themselves with the school community.

The Brilliant Star uniform consists of:

- Shirts embroidered with the school logo
- Shoes, socks, and bottoms of your choice (as long as they do not have cartoons, superheroes or fantasy characters on them).

The shirts are ordered by the school and will be made available at cost. We are asking all families to purchase at least four or five shirts per child so that a clean outfit can be worn each day.

Even young children should dress in clothing that they can put on and fasten for themselves: pullover shirts, elastic waistbands, Velcro sneakers, etc.

Children should wear clothing that is neat, comfortable and clean.

Please do not allow your child to come in wearing:

- Clothing with holes or tears
- Oversized shirts, pants or shorts
- Clothing that leave shoulders, midriffs (belly buttons) and backs bare
- Clothing imprinted with cartoons, superheroes and fantasy characters
- Shoes imprinted with cartoons, superheroes and fantasy characters
- Hats inside the school buildings

## What to bring to School

Your child should bring the following items on the first day of school:

- **All children:**
  - An extra school uniform
  - Indoor shoes with soft soles (this is for the children's safety, as a glass or bowl is occasionally broken during work)
  - Sunscreen and a hat for outdoor activities
- **Toddlers:**
  - Several extra diapers and wipes
  - One photo of the child, which will be used to identify their cubby
  - One photo of the child with his family, which will be placed in the photo album for the children to look at any time
- **Elementary:**
  - Backpack or satchel or waterproof bag for carrying materials home
  - A pencil case
  - Two pencils and an eraser
  - Crayons (16 or 24 pack)
  - Colored pencils

You may wish to clearly mark all items with your child's name.

Please do not send your child to school with markers, stickers, candy or toys.

Please do not send your toddlers and primary children to school with backpacks. All materials are provided for them in the classroom, and the only thing they may need to



carry is a change of clothing and lunch. The toddler and primary classrooms do not have extra space for backpacks.

## Lunch

In the Primary classroom, lunch is a peaceful time during which the children often listen to various musical compositions. At the Elementary level, lunch is a time for continued social gathering.

Full-day students can order school lunch for \$0.75. School lunch is provided by a caterer selected by PSS. Orders for lunch can be made in advance or daily before 8:30 a.m.

Students can also bring home lunch. Please do not send your child with lunch-boxes with cartoons, superheroes or fantasy characters.

Cups and cutlery are provided. Please include a reusable freezer block to keep perishables fresh.

Brilliant Star places great emphasis on the importance of good nutrition as the first step to a lifelong wellness education program. Lunch is an important part of not only your child's school day, but of her health education, and we count on you to work with your child to teach her about health and nutrition.

We all want to pack lunches that our children will eat. The challenge is to help them discover that wholesome, low-fat sugar-free foods can taste even better than junk food and don't have the negative effects on our bodies.

Please do not send your child in with sugary desserts or drinks. Please, NO SODAS! At Brilliant Star, the children tend to quickly develop the habit of drinking water. If you do want to send in a prepared drink, read the labels and look for 100% pure fruit juices.

All uneaten foods that can be contained will be sent home. You'll want to monitor your child's lunch box to see what they like and dislike, and to determine the correct amount of food to pack. We appreciate your care in preparing a good lunch.

Unfortunately, in the Primary Classroom, it is not possible for the school to heat up children's lunches. If your child requires a hot lunch, please send the food with a "hot pack" or in a thermos. However, be aware, that food that is left warm for several hours can go bad. In the Elementary classroom, a microwave oven will be available to warm up lunches.

## Snack

As part of the practical life skills of the toddler and primary classrooms, the children will prepare a snack each day. We order fresh fruits and vegetables from a local vendor and the children will prepare the food.

Special Dietary Restrictions: Some students may follow a special diet for health, religious or medical reasons. Please be sure to notify the teachers if your child should avoid certain foods. This will be taken into account in planning snacks or on days when the class prepares its own lunch.

## Birthday Celebrations

A child's birthday is a time of celebration and we welcome the opportunity to celebrate this occasion with your child in the classroom. The celebration in the class revolves around the child's life and special events that have occurred. Parents are encouraged to create a timeline of the child's life using one picture for each year of the child's life and anecdotes from family members. The child is welcome to bring in a simple nutritious special snack such as fruit, vegetables or dessert to share with the class. This occasion is a celebration and is not meant to be a birthday party, therefore we ask that no presents, gift bags, etc., be distributed at this time.

All birthday celebrations must be pre-arranged with the classroom teacher.

If the entire class is invited to your child's birthday party, invitations may be given out at the school. If only a few children are invited, please distribute the invitations yourself outside of Brilliant Star. Please remember children can be very sensitive and do not always understand why they have not received an invitation, so please be discrete.

## Physical Education

Physical activity not only improves health, reduces stress and improves concentration, it also promotes correct physical growth and development. Exercise has a positive influence on academic achievement, emotional stability and interaction with others. Through providing positive experiences we aim to instill a lifelong interest in physical activity.

All students are encouraged to participate to the best of their ability. The teacher will take note of any medical condition of individual children in their class (such as asthma, diabetes or epilepsy) so they can participate safely and as fully as possible.

What to bring:

- Students must have properly fitting running shoes. Shoes must be worn at all times.
- All students shall have their own water bottle. Sharing water bottles will not be allowed.
- Sun hats and sunscreen.

## General Points

- Jewelry (necklaces, watches, etc.) must be removed prior to PE.
- Children must bring a note from a physician if they are unable to participate due to illness or injury.
- Children not participating will remain with their class: helping in the lesson or doing PE related tasks.

## Freedom and Discipline

As a school that emphasizes both character development and intellectual development, Brilliant Star expects students to demonstrate kindness, courtesy, and respect toward the school and fellow students, parents, teachers, and staff.

The goals are to establish a safe, warm and caring environment within which students learn positive and appropriate ways to handle situations; to develop a strong sense of self-discipline, responsibility and courtesy; and to develop an atmosphere conducive to peaceful studies.

When anyone at Brilliant Star finds it difficult to follow the school's expectations about interpersonal conduct, we will quickly bring the student, family, and staff together to work toward a solution.

We follow an approach based on empowerment, mutual respect, and trust. Neither corporal punishment, nor physical or emotional intimidation, is allowed at Brilliant Star. If anyone consciously or flagrantly violates the social contract regarding safety, kindness, and courtesy, our response is to identify the appropriate and natural consequences of their actions. For example, if something is purposely broken, it must be replaced or repaired, preferably not by the parents alone, but by the students whose actions led to the damage.

At the Primary and Elementary levels, and with some older toddlers, children are aware that hitting, pushing and other similar physical acts are not acceptable expressions of emotions. Children often display such behavior out of frustration, nevertheless, the behavior is not acceptable. Brilliant Star has a "Zero Tolerance" policy towards such behaviors.

If your child displays such behavior, they will be sent home for the day. We find that this is the clearest way for children to understand that such behavior is not acceptable in social settings. When such acts occur, we help the child identify and come to terms with their own emotions that led them to display such behavior, we encourage them to take reparative action towards the other child, and we help them to understand that having to leave the school for the day is a natural consequence of the behavior they displayed. It is

usually a very positive interaction for the child that is sent home. They come to value the clear limits.

As a parent, the question that you'll face is "What do I do once I pick up my child?". Your child will look to you and your actions for guidance and for cues. It is best to avoid two extremes. First, avoid severely rebuking or reprimanding your child for her behavior. If you get a sense your child wants to talk about the incident, it is helpful to ask her about it, and how she feels about it, and what she thinks about it. You may wish to help him identify his own emotions leading up to the behavior, and ask him to suggest other ways he might deal with his emotions in the future. Finally, it helps to acknowledge the child's current feelings with a statement like "You must be sad about having to leave your friends at school," and then close with some encouragement about the future, "You may feel upset at school again. You've had a chance to think about other ways you can respond to how you feel in the future."

The second reaction to avoid is making light of the behavior, or worse, "rewarding" the behavior by taking your child somewhere special. If possible, the child should be taken home and their activities limited for the rest of the school day. The day should not become like a regular "Saturday" at home. Being at home, away from school should act as a consequence for the behavior at school. If the child is coming home and having great fun the rest of the school day with his parent or caretaker, the child's behavior is reinforced.

### ***Chronic behavior problems***

If behavior is not resolved and becomes chronic, jeopardizing the safety and well-being of children in the classroom or on the playground, or causing regular disruption to the classroom, teachers will document the issue, discuss it with the Principal, and meet with the parents to make a plan of action and possibly recommend assistance from local community health and social service agencies.

### ***Major behavior problems***

Brilliant Star considers the following to be major behavior problems:

- Interference with the rights of others, including physical abuse such as hitting, punching or kicking (and biting in elementary age children)
- Verbal abuse such as teasing, taunts, threats or intimidation
- Bullying whether by physical aggression, social alienation, or verbal aggression and intimidation
- Intentional damage to school or personal property
- Use of obscene, profane, suggestive language verbally or in writing
- Repeated disruptive or uncooperative behavior

Major behavior problems will be documented by the teacher on an "Incident Report", a copy given to the parent and a copy to the Principal. The principal, along with the teacher, parents, and student will work cooperatively to address the behavior and resolve the issue. If the issue is not resolved after a few attempts, the School may suspend or expel the student.

## Section 3: Student Health

### When Your Child is Ill

Brilliant Star places extreme importance on the health and safety of children, and it is the responsibility of all members of the school community – parents and teachers alike – to keep the children healthy. A child should not be sent to school if they show signs of illness or fever. Out of consideration for the other students a child should not be sent to school if they have a heavy or persistent cough, eye infection, or severe nasal excretions. Students with symptoms of vomiting, diarrhea, or undiagnosed skin rash should remain at home also. The student will be sent home if any of the symptoms appear while he or she is at school. Students with infectious diseases, such as chicken pox or strep throat, must stay out of school until the contagious stage has passed. For the sake of the other children's health, it is vital that you let the office know your child's doctor's diagnosis as soon as possible. Whenever your child is ill and won't be coming to school, please call the office between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. to let us know that she will be absent so we don't worry.

### If Your Child Gets Sick at School

If your child ever feels ill, we will take her to the office. If she seems to be fairly sick, or if after a brief stay she feels too ill to return to class, we will contact you to arrange for her to be picked up right away. We understand how difficult it can be for working parents to break free during the day, and yet all of our children get ill from time to time. You will want to make arrangements with a friend or relative in advance.

### Emergency Care

Most of our faculty and staff are trained in first aid and CPR. In the event of any situation that requires immediate medical attention, we will want your child to see a doctor right away. Please remember to keep your emergency information form up-to-date and inform the office immediately if there are any changes in your address or phone number during the academic year. We must be able to reach you at any time during the school day. If your child needs immediate medical attention, and you cannot be reached, your enrollment agreement authorizes us to seek medical care in your name. We will take your child to the emergency room at CHC. Naturally, we will continue our efforts to contact you.

### Medication

Except under extraordinary situations, we do not administer medication at school. Please do not send in any medication with your child, including aspirin or other over-the-counter drugs, except under a doctor's instructions as explained below. Antibiotics and other medications should be scheduled so that doses are due during hours when the

student is at home. When children are so ill as to require frequent medication, they probably shouldn't be in school for the day. When, in the opinion of your child's physician, it is necessary that medication be administered during school hours, a representative of the school will give it to your child in accordance with the following procedures:

- Any medication brought to school must be left with the staff in the school office, where it will be secured.
- Our staff members are prohibited from providing or administering any medication, including aspirin, to any students except as authorized by you as parent or guardian and the child's physician, in accordance with the following procedures:
  1. Prescription Medications: All medications sent from home must be accompanied by the "Authorization to Administer Medication" and "Physician's Statement" forms before the first day medication is administered at the school. Any medication sent without the appropriate completed authorization form will not be administered and will be sent home.
  2. If a medication is to be administered on an on-going basis, the Authorization to Administer Medication should indicate the duration of treatment.
  3. In cases involving long-term medication for chronic conditions, a new authorization form must be filed with the school each year in August. Any medication changes during the school year must be accompanied by a new medication form.
  4. We can only administer oral medications.
  5. We can accept only the appropriate dose for one day at a time. Medication will not be kept at school overnight, nor will containers of more than one day's dosage be accepted. The original bottle containing the medication must be clearly labeled with the student's name, medication contained, and the time(s) and amount(s) of dosage. This policy applies to prescription and over-the-counter medications. A new authorization form must be completed for each episode of illness and each new medication. When having the prescription filled, you may request two bottles.
  6. As parent (guardian), you are responsible for administering the first day's dosage of any new medication at home.
  7. As parent (guardian), you are responsible for notifying the school in person or by telephone on the first morning a new medication is being brought in with the completed authorization form and physician's statement.
  8. Whenever possible, medication schedules should be arranged to cause minimal interruption in the student's school day.
  9. A copy of the form authorizing us to dispense medication may be obtained from the school office.
  10. We will strictly adhere to this policy.

Over-the-Counter Medication: Absolutely no medications, including aspirin, Tylenol, cough remedies, or other over-the-counter medications will be given or allowed to be taken at school unless authorization is submitted in accordance with the above policy.

## Section 4: Academic Life

### Parent Conferences

Two parent conferences will be scheduled during the year. Additional conferences will be scheduled upon request.

#### Evaluation of Student Progress

Brilliant Star's curriculum is carefully structured and sequenced and the teachers maintain careful records of each student's progress. Because we do not compare students against an arbitrary standard or the performance of their classmates, we do not use letter grades. Instead, parents receive a detailed report of their child's progress in each area of the curriculum, indicating which areas have been mastered and which are in progress.

### Transitioning from one level to the next

The timing of the child's transition from the Toddler environment to the Primary program, and from the Primary program to the Elementary program, is determined by the level of development of the child. When the child shows sufficient mastery of the activities within the environment and is socially and physically ready to move on towards a more mature environment, the transition process begins. This process may take place at any time of the year, and is not based simply upon the child's age. The teachers meet together, and the teacher of the new classroom visits the child in their current classroom to observe their level of readiness. Typically, the teachers would meet with the parents to discuss the move, and the process begins by the child visiting the new classroom on a daily basis, until they eventually make the full transition into the more mature classroom. The teacher acts as a guide in this process and encourages independent exploration. The child's development leads the whole process.

(Toddlers must be toilet trained before entering the Primary classroom.)

### Observation

Parents are invited and even urged to observe the children at work. Formal observations are scheduled twice a year, just prior to parent conferences. However, you are welcome to arrange for observations at any other time. Contact your child's teacher to let them know when you would like to visit. In order to limit the number of adults in the classroom at the same time, and maintain the classroom as a "children's environment", we need to schedule observations so that they do not overlap or so that there are not too many observations scheduled within a short period of time. For these reasons all observations must be scheduled in advance. You will want to see the class at its normal routine and not responding to the novelty of your presence; therefore, when you visit, please sit in the designated observation chair in the classroom. A great deal can be learned by patient and quiet observation of your child and his or her classmates at work.

You will be given guidelines just before your observation period, to guide your experience in the classroom.

During the first sensitive weeks of the school year, students (especially the younger children) are familiarizing themselves with a new routine and new environment. For this reason, observations do not take place during the first several weeks of school.

The first year Primary children also are particularly sensitive to having their parents in the classroom. Often when their parents enter the classroom for an observation, the child would rather sit on their parent's lap, than work in the classroom. For this reason, parents of first year Primary children may not be able to attend an observation in their own child's classroom until closer to the end of the year, although they are welcome to schedule an observation in the other Primary classroom at any time.

Our Toddler classroom has an observation window in the Office where a parent can watch by scheduling a time with the office staff. Even if your child is not in the Toddler class, you will enjoy watching the students at work and will gain a better understanding of the program.

All visitors for observations need to sign in at the office upon arrival.

### How to find out what your child did at school

Have you experienced frustration when asking, "What did you do at school today?" Did you get the common answer, "Nothing." Or possibly your child tells you everyday that they did the same thing such as cylinder blocks or spooning beans. Don't be alarmed. We can assure you that your child is very busy at school doing a variety of learning activities designed to support their development.

Young children often have difficulty talking about what they do at school. They have done so many things that they often cannot sort out the specifics. Sometimes they don't remember the name of the materials that they used, such as the trinomial cube, the metal insets, or the addition strip board.

In addition to the difficulty children may have talking about their school experience, you may have noted that not many papers come home. They can be doing complex math, word building, writing on chalk boards, geography, and science lessons, all with manipulative materials that will have no paper work to show you their progress.

So how can you find out what your child is doing in school?

1. Ask your child questions that are more specific. "Did you do a counting lesson today? Did you work with colors or the binomial cube? Did you listen to Chopin or Bach?"



2. Stop in after school and talk to your child's teacher, or set up an appointment for a formal conference if you prefer.
3. Set up a time to observe your child in class.
4. Read a Montessori book.
5. Come to school meetings and workshops.
6. Play school with your child at home. Sometimes children will show you through their play what they are learning.
7. Be patient. In time it will be obvious that your child is growing and learning everyday.

### Parent Education Evenings

It is widely recognized that the success of any educational program is highly dependent upon the role and support of the child's parents. Brilliant Star holds periodic Parent Education Evenings that are aimed at helping you gain a deep appreciation of the activities in the classroom, and to discuss various issues facing parents. If there are particular topics that you would like to see covered, please let the Principal know. Because of your importance in the education of your child, attendance at these evenings is required.

## Section 5: Parents & the School

### A Place of Community

In our rapidly changing world it has become increasingly difficult to establish the community bonds that unite people. Our friends, and more importantly, our children's friends, move out of one village to another, or even off island, as our families or careers dictate. Those of us who cherish a close-knit community have to create our own by joining together with people with whom we share similar interests, concerns, and values.

At Brilliant Star students know that they belong, that they are respected, and that they are cared for not only by their parents, but by the larger community of fellow students, teachers, and other parents in the school, many of whom have known them almost all their lives.

Brilliant Star brings together families who have chosen to identify with a common commitment to the shared concerns, values, and expectations they have for their children. We come from different backgrounds, but our sense of community exists in spite of, or perhaps because of it.

Brilliant Star teaches us to understand and appreciate cultural differences and shared human values: universal peace and unity.

In any community of diverse people and views, it is inevitable that occasionally there will be differences, sometimes even clashes, disagreements and hurt feelings.

If you have concerns about a particular issue or individual, you are urged to bring the concern directly to the individual involved, or to ask the Principal for help in solving the problem. And if you have concerns about particular school policies or activities, please share these with us rather than airing them with other families. Let's work together to constructively address any concerns.

### Volunteering the Gift of Time and Talent

Parents play a crucial role at Brilliant Star. This is a community of parents and educators. Few schools are so open and responsive to suggestions and concerns. Brilliant Star strongly encourages families to feel at home and to participate in the broader life of the school through social and educational activities offered by the school. Although some parents may spend considerable amounts of time as volunteers at Brilliant Star, there is no expectation for a set time commitment.

There are some things that even money can't buy, and one of the most valuable contributions that families make to Brilliant Star is the gift of their time and expertise. Parents, grandparents, and friends of the school who give of their time and talent share with their families special memories of experiences and friendships that endure well beyond their children's graduation.

A few ways in which you can help out at Brilliant Star:

- Lend your time and support to the fund raising efforts.
- Help with special events such as School Picnics, Parent Education Evenings, the International Day Celebrations, the Year End Ceremony, and school service projects.
- Share your special skills with the school – carpentry, computer skills, plumbing, publishing, gardening, photography, sewing, woodworking, lawn care, anything at all!

Brilliant Star depends on our combined talents. Talk with the Principal if you are able to help.

### Communication between home and school

It is very important for teachers and parents to establish and maintain close communication. Please feel free to ask questions or discuss anything related to your child's progress. We ask, however, that you understand that the teacher's responsibility during school is to the students.

Morning arrival in particular is a very sensitive period when the teachers are greeting each student and setting a calm, pleasant tone for the day. Interruptions need to be kept to a minimum. If you must speak with the teacher in the morning, please make arrangements to meet before school begins. Otherwise you can correspond via a note and the teachers will get back to you by phone or will send a note to set up a conference as needed.

Regular meetings between parents and teachers are encouraged, appreciated, and necessary for your child's happy and healthy development.

### Parents as Ambassadors

You, as parents, have played a crucial role in the success of Brilliant Star. It has been word of mouth, more than anything else, which has resulted in the rapid growth of the School. Please continue to share your enthusiasm with the community.

The enrollment process has been put in place to help interested parents learn about the school and to see if the School is a good match for their family. More than anything else, we look for families who seek to understand and support the vision and the curriculum of the School.

## Section 6: Finances & Giving

### Tuition Policy

Brilliant Star is a non-profit organization dependent on tuition as its principle source of income. As a non-profit organization, there are no “owners”, and any extra funds go back into the school to support its programs. Student accounts must be kept up-to-date. The school will be forced to withhold any and all services to students whose accounts have fallen behind unless written arrangements have been made for deferred payment. Your cooperation is essential and very much appreciated.

### Tuition Assistance & Financial Aide

We are happy to have put into place a process for making financial assistance available to families who have difficulty meeting the tuition expenses. We recognize that the cost of an education of the quality provided by Brilliant Star is expensive. We also recognize that the ability to make this education available to families who could not normally afford the price can have a tremendous impact on the future of the child and generations to come. We seek to make the School available to interested families, regardless of their ability to pay. A Financial Aide Officer has been assigned to help interested families apply for assistance. The program is primarily funded by fundraising efforts. You may also make a contribution towards this program. Please encourage those who would not normally consider a private education to look to Brilliant Star.

### Reenrollment

Reenrollment at Brilliant Star is normally automatic, but is not guaranteed. Decisions are made by the administration and faculty, based on an annual review of each student’s academic progress, social and emotional development, special needs (if applicable), along with the attitudes and values expressed by the child and parents. As always, our goal is to help each child and family find the perfect match between the student, home, and school. Reenrollment materials will be sent home in February and are due back at the school by March 15 along with the annual registration deposit. If the school has not received a student’s reenrollment materials by March 15, his space will be made available to new students who have applied for admission to the school.

No student may reenroll if there is an outstanding balance remaining on her account.

## Fund Raising & the Educational Tax Credit

Brilliant Star is a non-profit organization. Fundraising has been at the heart of the growth of Brilliant Star.

We are very fortunate to have in place, Public Law 10-73, known as the Educational Tax Credit Law. This progressive law, which has been in effect in the CNMI since 1997, is an easy, low cost way to make a tremendous impact on your child's education and on the future of the school.

Families can take advantage of the Educational Tax Credit, both through their business taxes, and through their individual taxes. The law allows for businesses and individuals to make a contribution to a qualified educational institution, and to receive a tax *credit* for the contribution. A tax credit means that any amount you contribute to the school counts as if you had paid that amount towards your taxes. It is a tax *credit*, which is much better than a tax *deductible* contribution.

The Educational Tax Credit contributions are made in place of Wage and Salary Tax, or in place of Earnings Tax, for individuals. For businesses, the contribution is made in place of Business Gross Revenue Tax (BGRT) quarterly. The maximum allowable contribution is \$5,000 per year per taxpayer.

This is an amazing opportunity to make a significant contribution to the school, at relatively little cost. We encourage families to take advantage of this wonderful program. If you have questions about the program, please ask us. We can direct you to other parents who use the Educational Tax Credit as a means of supporting their children's education.

The current operations and the future growth of Brilliant Star depend upon your generous contributions. The school can serve our children only through our financial assistance.

Every time you make a contribution to Brilliant Star, you are making an investment in our children's future and in the future of humanity.