

RIVER HILLS ACADEMY HANDBOOK



Fall, 2025

Introduction

Background

My name is Mylissa Russell. My experience with children began working in childcare centers and as a day camp counselor. In college I did work study and student teaching in K- 1st grade. I graduated from Baker University in 1989 with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, and an emphasis in Special Education. I received minors in Psychology, English, and Religion. After graduating, I worked on a one year grant as a Parent/Infant Specialist for The Wyandotte County Health Department. In 1990 I began teaching 4th grade in Lansing, Kansas where I taught for nine years. I was named Teacher of the Week by a local radio station, and Teacher of the Quarter by Lansing, KS. I also coordinated the annual state math competition, created and implemented a new science curriculum for all 4th graders in the district, and served as coordinator of the K-5 annual talent show. During that time, I served as Chair on several school accreditation committees for the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA). I taught until 1999 when I opened River Hills Academy, now in its 27th year. RHA began as a preschool, with the first class of kids then homeschooled up to 7th grade. I then started over as a preschool where I plan to remain. My K-9 teaching certificate is kept current through continued university classes. I am listed as one of 5% of teachers included in Who's Who Among American Teachers, an honor I received since beginning our school. I am also a photographer for The Platte County Landmark.

Family

My husband is Mike. The kids call him "Uncle Mike." Mike is Senior Director of Software Development at Broadridge. Mike works from home. We have two children, whom also attended River Hills Academy. Miller (26) is a Firefighter/EMT in Parkville for Southern Platte Fire Protection District (SPFPD). Mycah (29) is a Manager in Threat Intelligence at Microsoft.

Parent Information

Facility

The address of River Hills Academy is 10113 River Hills Drive, Parkville, Missouri, 64152. My cell phone number is 816-914-7760. Mike's cell phone number is 816-914-7770.

Website/RHA NOW

Our website is located at Mylissarussell@wixsite.com. All themes, events, and policies are located on our site. Parents have a private member page called *RHA NOW*.

Social Media

Facebook [page](https://www.facebook.com/RiverHillsAcademy): Facebook.com/RiverHillsAcademy

Private Facebook [group page](https://www.facebook.com/groups/RiverHillsAcademy): Facebook.com/groups/RiverHillsAcademy

Pictures are sent to parents via text, and are also posted on our Facebook page and our website.

No identifying information is posted with their picture.

Hours of Operation

River Hills Academy is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday - Friday. **Arrive by 8:55!**

You will be charged five dollars per minute before 7:30 and after 5:00. This is strictly enforced.

School is closed **at** 5:00. **You must arrive by 4:55.** You are charged *for each minute you are here* after 5:00. Alexa makes an announcement at 4:55. At 5:00 Alexa announces that school is closed and locks the door. If you/your child are here when the door locks, that is the first \$5.

Schedule

Our Daily Schedule, Theme Schedule and Events Schedule are posted on the cubby closet door, in the classroom, and online. They are also sent home at the beginning of each new school year.

Daily Schedule

Times may vary slightly, but we do these things in this order.

7:30 - 9:00	Arrival/Play Time
9:00 – 9:20	Show-n-Tell
9:20 – 9:30	Snack Time
9:30 – 10:30	Theme Activity
10:30 –11:15	Outdoor Time/Play Time
11:15 - 11:30	Water Break/Perimeter Time
11:30 - 12:00	Creative Movement
12:00 - 1:30	Lunch/Story Time/Playtime
1:30 – 3:30	Quiet Time
3:30 - 4:00	Snack Time
3:30 – 5:00	Dismissal/Playtime

Scheduled Holiday Breaks *School will be closed on: (tuition required for part time students)*

Labor Day:	September 1 st
Thanksgiving:	November 26 th – 28 th
Christmas Break:	December 22 nd – January 2 nd
MLK Day:	January 19 th
President's Day:	February 16 th
Spring Break:	March 30 th – April 3 rd
Memorial Day:	May 25 th
Summer Break:	June 4 th & June 5 th
Holiday Break:	July 1 st - July 3 rd

Tuition and Attendance

Tuition is required prior to attendance. Tuition is due Monday if you paid weekly, or the first day of the month if paid monthly. There is a five dollar per day late fee. Accepted forms of payment are cash, check, or Zelle. Zelle is preferred. Most banks have Zelle, or there is an app. Make checks out to Mylissa Russell, not RHA. Receipts are given on request.

Full time/five days per week

- Tuition is \$200. per week.
- Tuition is required for absences not on the school schedule.
- Tuition is not required for snow days (up to five) and scheduled breaks on our school schedule.

Part time/less than five days per week

- Tuition is \$40. per the # of days enrolled per week.
- You choose the # of days per week your child will attend. You are responsible for that # of days each week. Two weeks' notice is required to change that number.
- Days can be switched around or made up as long as it's within the same week.
- You can always add extra days.
- Tuition is required for snow days and scheduled breaks on our school schedule.

Days of enrollment

- *Three days per week minimum is required.
- *Two weeks notice is required to change the # of days enrolled per week. If you have not given two weeks notification, you will be charged the current # of days per week on file.

Summer Tuition

- *Days of enrollment may be changed for summer with two week's notice.
- *Three days per week minimum is not required during summer. However, enrollment or tuition for at least one day per week is required to hold your spot.

Siblings

- *Sibling enrollment extends to visits during the school year after they graduate. Siblings must be enrolled to visit.
- *Each sibling is enrolled separately. Siblings may not share a spot. Days of enrollment apply to each sibling separately. Tuition is paid accordingly.

Enrollment after graduation

- *Enrollment extends to visits during the school year after graduation.
- *Graduates who return for summer must adhere to the summer tuition policy above.

Regulations

Private School

River Hills Academy is registered as a private school with the Missouri Department of Education. RHA follows the regulations set forth accordingly.

Safety

The house has been inspected and approved by the State Fire Marshal and the Missouri Department of Health's Sanitation Department. I am CPR certified. Emergency procedures are posted. We practice fire/tornado drills. Our house has three carbon monoxide detectors, 14 smoke alarms, outlet covers, syrup of Ipecac, and all tall furniture bolted to walls. There are 11 indoor cameras, and seven outdoor cameras. The camera in the classroom is only viewed by me. The door automatically locks at 9:00am and is unlocked at 3:30pm.

Immunizations

Per state regulations, children must have a record of immunizations or an exempt form on file.

Health And Wellness

Per state regulations, children may not attend school with Covid symptoms regardless of test or doctor diagnosis. Please refer to our Covid policy. If they have a runny nose or cough from the common cold they must be kept home during the first few days.

My family and I have had health assessments and Criminal and Child Abuse/Neglect screenings.

Illness

Per state regulations, your child may not attend school **within 24 hours** of a temperature 100 or above. They're still contagious during this time. *Medicine to reduce a fever does not render them non-contagious.* They must have a temperature below 100 for 24 hours *without medicine.*

Per state regulations, a child is not to be brought to school and must be sent home if he/she:

- Vomits.

- Has persistent coughing.

- Has difficult or rapid breathing.

- Has a sore throat or trouble swallowing.

- Has unusual spots, rashes, or infected skin.

- Is in the contagious period of a disease or virus.

- Has dark, tea-colored urine, or gray or white stool.

- Has diarrhea or more than one abnormally loose stool.

- Has severe itching of the body or scalp, or scratching of the scalp.

- Has Pinkeye, redness of eyelid lining, tears, irritation, or discharge.

- Has a fever over 100 degrees Fahrenheit by mouth or 99 under the arm.

You and I are bound to the above regulations. Please don't bring them or ask for them to stay if they have a new cough or runny nose, a temperature within 24 hours, or a listed symptom.

Program

Thematic Learning

A new theme is introduced each week or two. We do a daily theme activity. We may take a field trip as it relates to a theme. We may have guest speakers. During structured and free times, social and academic skills are taught. At the end of each theme questions for home are listed in the Theme tab. Hopefully this will stimulate discussion about their day and aid your discussion after, "What did you do today?"

Show-n-Tell

Show-n-Tell is optional but time is scheduled for it each morning. Children may bring a toy, souvenir, picture, etc. Or, maybe they have a "tell" which can be an event over the weekend or a funny story. Show-n-Tell Toys may be taken out of their backpacks during playtime if they choose to share. Only one Show-n-Tell may be brought to school each day.

Perimeter Time

Alternately referred to as "Circumference Time" depending on the carpet. This time is to play games, sing songs, learn sign language, learn about the world around us, and learn more about our weekly theme.

Creative Movement

This is a time to encourage and develop fine and gross motor skills, and to teach expression through music and movement. This is also a unique time where children can use creativity and pretend in combination with music. This is most everyone's favorite time of the day!

Alexa Classroom:

Our classroom has an Echo Show and Alexa enabled printer. All lights are Lutron Caseta and operate through Alexa. The playhouse light is operated with a Ring lightbulb, and also works through Alexa. We have several "routines" and "skills" used through Alexa.

Record of Progress

A sample of activities and funsheets are saved for a yearly portfolio.

Special Days and Parties

We will celebrate Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter. If your family celebrates anything not listed, we will include it also.

We will celebrate each child's birthday. Treats may be brought from home.

If personal birthday invitations are extended to school friends, they must be extended to everyone. Please don't choose or exclude particular children.

Hard candy, gum, and latex balloons are not allowed at school.

Food and Drink

I provide a morning and afternoon snack. However, unless it is close to a meal time, any time a child says they're hungry I offer them a snack.

Each child brings a lunch from home. There is a microwave and refrigerator in the classroom. I provide plates and utensils. If more than a few bites are left, I send the remaining lunch home in a baggy so you can see what they're eating, what they like, and gauge how much to pack.

Any food containing tree nuts or peanuts are not allowed at school.

Each child has their own water bottle with a covered straw that is kept on shelf by a UV-C light air purifier.

Please be mindful that we only have one microwave and one set of hands for a group of kids during lunch. Please follow these policies so kids aren't waiting for their lunch while other kids are eating, or finished eating:

*Don't send meals requiring more than two minutes in the microwave (mac-n-cheese cups, frozen meals...) Prepare and cook at home. It will be warmed up at school.

*Peel oranges before sending them to school.

*Lunchables are discouraged for routine lunches. When they are sent, don't send the box. Unpack the items out of the Lunchable box and place the separate items into their lunchbox.

General Policies

Arrival/Departure

Students can be brought to the classroom, or you can watch them walk up. If they walk up on their own you must listen to make sure they are greeted before you leave. *Do not leave until you hear me greet your child.* Please arrive by 8:55am.

You may pick up from the classroom, or text and I will send them down to meet you at the front door. You must come inside to get them. They aren't allowed to open the door. They will sit on the bottom stair and I will monitor them via camera on my phone. Please don't yell for your child from downstairs as it's disruptive, and if I don't hear you, but they do and leave, it compromises their safety. Likewise, please don't motion from your car if we are outside.

Please leave all shoes downstairs. Slippers that have never been worn outside may be used in the classroom. There are shoe coverings in the cubby closet for adults.

Parents that come upstairs must first sanitize their hands with the provided sanitizer.

Extra Clothes

Your child, of any age, should have a change of clothes here or in their backpack. There are various reasons they may need a change of clothes and it's a particular kind of emergency when there are no clothes for them.

Belongings

Each child will need to bring a backpack to school *daily*. It will be hung in the classroom. Please make sure the backpack is large enough to hold not only what you send each day, but what needs to be sent home. *Each backpack will have a clip/pin attached that should not be removed.* It's used to send home things including projects that might get ruined inside their backpacks and important information from school. You may use it to attach notes, tuition, and things you need to make sure I see.

Their coats and jackets are hung downstairs in the cubby closet. Each child has their own cubby.

Each morning lunches are placed in the hallway outside the classroom door, or in the refrigerator inside the classroom.

Outside Time

We try to go outside daily, either to play or for a walk. Please dress your child appropriately for the weather and in comfortable clothes. Discretion will be used in deciding if the weather is appropriate for outside activities based on comfort level, wind chill and heat index. Children will not be exposed to either extreme element. Late spring through early fall: apply sunscreen before school. Keep sunscreen in their backpack. If we go outside in the afternoon I will reapply it. You can send bug spray. It's kept here and applied when we're on the hill in the backyard.

Communication

Most communication takes place at drop off/pick up time. A note attached to the clip/pin on their backpack will have an answer returned the same day. More detailed or private subjects can be emailed or sent via text. Please don't text on holidays, and be mindful of things that can wait until school hours or be found on our website or FB group page.

Substitutes

In the event I need to be absent from school, someone I trust will substitute for me while I'm gone. This is usually a family member. I will give you advance notification.

Snow Days

Due to liability and risk to your child, if Park Hill School District closes for weather, RHA is also closed. There are times that the street, driveway and walkway aren't safe. It's particularly dangerous with multiple cars arriving and leaving, multiple children outside, and the risk of cars sliding down the driveway or street. Ice makes the walkway bricks especially dangerous. I'm unable to lend any assistance outside and also be inside with children at the same time, nor can I keep the driveway clear of falling snow. If Park Hill cancels, it's not safe for us to have school as well. RHA relies on Park Hill to make weather decisions and they're followed explicitly.

If Park Hill calls for a late start, RHA opens at 9:30 am. If they call for early release, RHA is closed an hour after that call. Early start and early release do not effect tuition.

You can sign up on their website to receive texts alerts, and I will also communicate via text.

School Supplies

You are not required to provide school supplies or pay a fee for them. However, donations are expected. In this way it is cheaper for all of us; everyone has an eye open for sale items, we don't have to spend a huge amount of money at one time on supplies or a huge fee for them at the beginning of the year, and notes do not come home when your child runs out of a certain item that needs replaced.

Tuition is based on comparable schools in our area that require you bring your own supplies or pay a fee.

A list of needed donations is on our website. We also have an Amazon list.

Do you have meat trays, popsicle sticks, wine corks, extra buttons, liquid detergent lids, toilet paper rolls, Pringles cans, ribbon, wrapping paper, bows, film canisters, shoe boxes, baby food jars, craft scraps, left-over food? *Send it to school! We can find a way to use or recycle almost anything!*

Please bring a few donations at least a couple times a year. *If no donations have been received by December 1st and May 1st respectively, you will be charged \$50.00, the amount of the average school supply fee. You do not need to spend this much! A few donations are much cheaper!*

Box Tops

Box Tops For Education is a great program that gives us 10 cents for each Box Top. This money is used for needed items in the classroom. *All you have to do is scan your receipt!* For more information go to [boxtops4education](https://boxtops4education.org).

Animals

Per state regulations, animals are not allowed to visit school unless they have been cleared by the Health Department. This includes reptiles.

There are three dogs that live in our house: Mylo, age 13, an 8 lb hypo-allergenic maltipoo, and Indi and Skye, both mini Australian shepherds. Indi is five years old as of December, 2025. Skye is four years old as of September, 2025. Our daughter's dog, Luna (9 years old), also a mini-Australian shepherd, is sometimes here. All are kept current on shots, and have had professional training. They are protective herding dogs (except for Mylo). They are very protective of the kids here and are therefore put away during drop off and pick up. They also love attention from their friends so their time in the classroom is specific and limited.

Potty-Training

Children aren't required to be potty-trained. You may send diapers or Pull-ups in bulk, or put them in their backpack.

Success starts at home. Please remember RHA isn't a daycare. Varied ages are here for an active, busy day of preschool. I'm not able to give the kind of one on one all day attention needed to potty train. But they are welcome to be here un-trained, and I'll encourage and cheer on their successes.

A child is never in trouble for having a toilet accident. However, children in underwear are expected to tell me they've had an accident.

A child is considered potty-trained when they're able to consistently release *and* hold urine/feces *independently without prompting, coaxing, or reminding*. *They may not wear Pull-Ups or underwear until this point.*

They may wear Pull-ups after their diaper is dry for five consecutive school days, without prompting, coaxing, or reminding. If they're pooping in Pull-ups, diapers are still required.

They may wear underwear after their Pull-Up is dry for five consecutive school days, without prompting, coaxing, or reminding.

If they have more than one accident in underwear, Pull-ups are required for five consecutive days. After five days without prompting, coaxing, or reminding, they may again wear underwear.

Please don't use Pull-ups as diapers. Pull-ups are efficient for dribbles or minor accidents when they didn't quite get there, not absorption. If they aren't attempting to use the restroom without coaching, and/or just waiting to be changed, they aren't ready for Pull-ups. If they aren't bothered when wet or poopy, don't ask to be changed or tell you they're wet/poopy, and don't tell you without being asked if they need to go, they aren't ready for Pull-Ups. Putting a child in a Pull-Up does not lead them to potty-train. Pull-Ups are just padded underwear they can pull up, or down. A child using a Pull-Up as a diaper means they need to be changed as if they're in a diaper, except this is a much bigger process that involves removing clothes to put on a new Pull-Up, as well as clean-up the Pull-Up isn't meant to handle. This means considerable time out of the classroom that I'm just not set up for in a school setting.

They can release urine when you sit them on the potty at a much younger age than when their muscles develop enough to begin holding urine. Next they may begin to stay dry at home. This doesn't mean they will be able to stay dry all day at school or know when to go without prompting. It's important to remember that potty-training is a process. Releasing urine is only part of the process. Holding urine/feces, knowing how long they can hold it, pulling their pants up and down, wiping, flushing, washing hands, etc. are also part of the process.

If you're relying on the teacher to make sure they stay dry, then they aren't potty-trained and aren't ready to be out of diapers or Pull-Ups.

They will probably be independently trained around three years. It doesn't matter how soon you start the process, they end at the same place. The younger you begin before they're ready - the longer the process - the more accidents they have.

To be successful they must want to be dry. *Staying dry is a choice they must want to make, and physically be able to do.* If it is your choice or they are doing it for you, it's a miserable process with long-term consequences. This has to be something they do for themselves. If it's to please you, receive rewards or avoid disappointing you, they'll come to school and have accidents. They must also be physically able to control the bladder muscles, which most children can't do until around age three. Wait until they are willing and able (Ready). If they want to stay dry and are physically able, they will "train" quickly. You may be ready, but if you wait until they're ready the experience will be the most positive.

In a group of other children, without that personal coach they have in you at home, and with many activities to distract them, they may have accidents. This is normal. This is what Pull-ups are made for - that in between time when they haven't quite learned how long they can wait, that time when you aren't there to remind them. In the environment we have here, underwear at home and Pull-ups at school are common during the potty learning process.

Potty-training is often so important to parents that it becomes a bigger question about their day than anything else that happened. In order to alleviate that, clear and concrete explanations to this policy are addressed in this handbook. Because, here at school it's no different than learning to swing, bounce a ball, tie their shoes, or any other gross motor milestone. The difference is those things aren't messy, costly, and have no stigma attached. While that is certainly understandable, at school potty-training is no more or less important than any other thing they're learning.

A School Within A Home Within A School

My family respects that we have a school within our home and makes many sacrifices to that end. We ask for the same consideration in that you respect that this is our home and that a family lives here. Please be especially mindful that Mike works from home. Please whisper downstairs.

Discrimination Policy

River Hills Academy does not tolerate discrimination *of any kind*. All faiths, religions, customs and holidays are accepted, none will be purposefully omitted, and no one will be asked to hide or alter their beliefs. As a private school RHA has a personalized philosophy tailored to our families. Since most families enrolled celebrate Christmas in the traditional way, we celebrate traditionally as well. This includes Santa, exchanging gifts, we call it Christmas, and we have a Christmas party. I'm happy to include other customs and celebrate them as well. For example, if your family celebrates Hanukkah we'll call it Hanukkah and we'll celebrate Hanukkah. In the past we've celebrated the Italian customs of an Italian family, and even had an Iranian feast at

Christmastime because we had an Iranian family enrolled. One year we celebrated The Chinese New Year, as one of the students was from China. Many of our themes highlight the world around us and incorporate the differences therein. I'm delighted to bring cultures and beliefs together and celebrate them. I'm just not willing to omit or alter them. I don't believe this is the message of tolerance or acceptance we want to send our kids. During any and every holiday, everyone is expected to show respect and acceptance for all cultures, customs, and beliefs. I try to celebrate anything at school that you celebrate at home. Please let me know anything at all that you'd like me to incorporate. But please don't ask for someone else's traditions or beliefs to be changed or hidden because yours are different. Everyone is part of the group.

Termination Policy

I will give two weeks' notice if a child will be terminated. Likewise, two weeks paid notice must be given by parents.

Philosophies

Brain-Based Learning

My goal is for your child to have fun and to love learning so that the stage is set for them to love school. Kids that love school do well in school. Behind the scenes I am constantly working to connect neurons to dendrites that create synapses within the brain. I teach them how to think, not what to think. This is the basis of Brain-based learning.

Scientists have discovered that circuits in children's brains become wired through how they learn. These synapses can be manipulated to grow and strengthen. Specific stimulations develop synapses aiding the brain to make more connections. Connections that are used become permanent. However, connections that are not made during these formative years are eliminated as possibilities. This is called synaptic pruning. This is why it is imperative that teachers of young children focus on ways to stimulate these connections. One example is in learning to spell your name. At first the brain concentrates on each letter. The more the connection is made, the stronger the pathway in the brain becomes and you can easily spell your name without concentrating on the spelling. It becomes a permanent connection. Millions of other synapses were needed before this point. I focus on how the connection is formed so that more connections are stimulated. In other words, how they think, not what they think. We learn the ABC's backwards and in sign language. We learn to spell each other's names, we learn the shape of our names, and so on. I focus on connections that aren't automatically taught. Connections that aren't made at this time in their life cannot be made later. My goal is in making as many connections as possible, going beyond rote learning and stimulating the areas needed for abstract thinking and problem solving that help them learn how to think. These are permanent formations they will have for a lifetime.

Connections that cross from one side of the brain's hemisphere to the other raise IQ. Therefore it's important to create pathways between reading and math, creativity and logic, visual and

auditory, and so on. I concentrate on stimulating both sides of the brain. For example, we may watch a short visual video clip, but along with that will be discussion and a hands on activity. Interestingly, when kids watch TV or a screen they only use one side of the brain while the other side shuts down during that time. This is especially damaging to preschoolers because of those many connections that, if not stimulated in their brain during this time, can't be stimulated later. Shutting down one side of their brain for periods of time is detrimental to a young child. I'm dedicated to engaging both sides of their brain in every activity.

Many areas of the brain complement other areas. For example, stimulating the area that decodes music also simulates the area used for math (symbols, sequencing, decoding). For this reason music is an integral part of our day. This is just one example of the science behind our daily routine.

Some other examples:

- *The brain uses glucose when learning. We use a lot of glucose! Glucose powers the brain and is the only fuel used by brain cells. Because neurons cannot store glucose, they depend on the bloodstream to deliver a constant supply of water. Therefore your child always has a water bottle with their name on it that they can drink from at any time. Similarly, if they say they are hungry I always give them a snack, unless it's close to meal time.

- *Challenges to the brain stimulate learning. You'll see us learning things beyond the average preschool scope and sequence. The concern they'll be too far ahead and become bored in Kindergarten is a misconception. Bright kids that love to learn will find ways to stimulate themselves. They'll pick up a book, turn their paper over and draw, etc. In my experience after nine years teaching in public school, the kids who struggled with boredom were those with a lower skill base that were indifferent to learning. Having a good skill base and love of learning only promotes feelings of success.

- *Anything new or novel stimulates synaptic connections. One of the ways this is fostered is through special days that involve dressing up, bringing something from home, or expressing ourselves in a unique way.

- *Different colors stimulate different parts of the brain. Our classroom has a blend of colors using this science. If you look closely there are different shades of purple, and splashes of orange. In some areas the colors are muted, and in others they're bright. This was purposefully designed based on color science in brain-based research.

I consistently focus on what goes into their brain. For example, on our way outside we count steps, practice rhyming words, or name our left and right shoe. While going potty there's a bulletin board of fun things like the ABC's in sign language. As I unpack their lunches we name food groups. And so on. I try to take advantage of any teachable moment I can.

The priority is for your child to have fun and love school. We might fire a million synapses during the day, but your child just thinks they're having a great time!

Discipline and Behavior

Right along with the ABC's children are learning appropriate behaviors: self-control, processing feelings, how to treat others, manners, positive attitudes, thinking of those around them, participating in a group, etc. Everything is a learning experience. Our job is to teach them the skills they need so they can be happy as they grow into independent and confident people. I believe in teaching rather than rescuing, and looking at the big picture, not just that moment. I teach these skills through guidance and support. I am fair and consistent in a firm yet loving and supportive manner.

My focus is to teach them to feel confident in themselves, have a positive attitude about school, and learn to be part of a group.

Children act differently in a group of children than they do at home. They will behave in ways at home that I won't see at school. They will behave in ways at school that you will never see at home. These behaviors will be both positive and negative and are normal.

No behavior is "just a stage." It may seem as though a behavior has passed, but in fact it has manifested. For example, kids that throw sand may later throw punches..unless they learn why they shouldn't throw sand, how it makes the other person feel, and that there is a consequence for this behavior. Another example is fit throwing. We've all seen adults that still throw fits. They no longer throw themselves down and cry, as their behavior has manifested. Instead, to get their way they display behaviors that cause just as much turmoil for the people around them. A child throws a fit because they haven't yet learned self-control, delay of gratification, consequences, and/or to think about how their behavior effects others. They don't wake up one day and have these skills. They learn them each time their behavior is modified through consistent, loving discipline. Children do go through stages. These are teachable moments to help them become better people in the long term. Behaviors that are ignored or allowed as just a stage will manifest and become part of their core self.

Their behavior becomes more positive or negative based on what they've learned through stages and lessons of childhood. It's more difficult to reteach behaviors the older they get. The earlier we can teach appropriate behavior, the happier they are and the happier the people around them are. These lessons begin at home. It's extremely difficult for a child to come to school and display appropriate behaviors if they aren't learning them at home. If the expectation isn't at home, it's hard for them to meet the expectation at school.

Many core behaviors are learned in preschool that include being part of a group, sharing, taking turns, thinking about the people around them, self-control, coping skills, and delay of gratification. These are basic life skills they need to be happy in life. With your help, I am committed to teaching these skills so they develop into good people who feel good about themselves.

Preschool is the first time children interact within a group of their peers. This becomes the foundation for learning how to be a happy, contributing member of the larger group that is society. Being part of a classroom where you're accepted by members that respect each other is just a smaller version of the world we envision for them in the future. From classrooms, jobs, sports teams, families, and society in general, this is a fundamental social skill needed not only for them to be happy, but in order to positively contribute so others are happy being around them. My goal is to teach them to see how their actions effect other people as well as themselves, and help them view their importance and role as part of a group. My hope is to do my part in helping them grow into tolerant and accepting adults that enter society asking first what they can contribute to make it better, not just for them, but everyone.

A common refrain is, "Think about the people around you." We talk about how it feels inside when we make good or bad choices. We learn basic principles such as sharing, taking turns, saying, "Excuse me," or "Would you like to go first?" We focus on the facial expressions of others, especially if they are in reply to our choices - both positive and negative. Identifying facial expressions helps us identify the emotions of others. Affect recognition is one of the hallmarks of a developed conscience.

Early childhood (two to four years old) is the critical age of conscience development. This is significant because there is no known successful treatment for a person who did not develop a conscience. In other words, you can't go back and form a conscience later. So this must be a critical focus at school and home. There are two components of a healthy conscience. One component is moral development and the ability to feel remorse and apathy. The other component is self control, delay of gratification, compliance to rules and social constructs, and the ability to resist temptation. While we mostly think of a conscience as simply being moral development, studies have shown self regulation and behavior compliance to be the biggest indicator of a fully formed conscience. Moral reasoning leads to moral conduct, with moral conduct being the pinnacle of a developed conscience. I'm committed to providing an environment that nurtures the development of a moral identity.

Multiage Learning

In a multiage classroom, children are viewed as individuals who move at their own pace. Expectations are adjusted for each child based on their own abilities, not the abilities of other children the same age. For example, if they're ready to start learning their phone number, we learn their phone number. They aren't forced to wait and learn something just because they're not the average age for that skill. Similarly, children aren't set up for failure by expecting them to learn things they aren't ready for.

Each child is honored and valued for being unique, and is given freedom to take risks, follow interests, and make choices. Learning is meaningful, relevant, and is considered a process not a product. Learning is also social and interactive.

Studies consistently show that children in a multiage classroom develop higher self-esteem, more cooperative behavior, better attitudes toward school, and are more caring, tolerant,

patient, and supportive. They have better interpersonal skills, deeper personal relationships, increased personal accountability, and less discipline problems.

Older students develop mentoring and leadership skills as a result of serving as role models and helping younger children. Younger children develop higher intellectually and have stronger communication skills because of these interactions. Older children model more sophisticated approaches to problem solving, and younger children are able to accomplish tasks they could not do without the assistance of older children. This dynamic increases the older child's level of independence and competence.

At every age in the spectrum there is a focus on positive peer support. There are numerous studies that conclude that children in this environment develop a sense of family with their classmates, who support and care for each other.

Go to choosingmultiage.com for a summary of frequently asked questions about multiage learning.

Teamwork

We are a team. Your child's success depends on you and I working as a team in accordance to what is best for your child. Communication, trust, and respect between us are everything. As your child learns to depend on us as their team, they're also being taught to be part of a team here at school. Teamwork makes the dream work!

Policy Acknowledgement Form

I have registered an account on the River Hills Academy website located at: mylissarussell.wixsite.com/mysite. I agree to stay up to date through the parent's only member page: *RHA Now*.

I have read the handbook. I understand and acknowledge the policies of River Hills Academy as stated in the handbook. I agree to adhere to such policies.

Parent Signature

Date