

## RIVER VALLEY CHARTER SCHOOL – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **What is a charter school?**

A charter school is a public school that is governed by a board of trustees and operates independently of any school committee under a five-year charter granted by the Board of Education. It has the freedom to organize around a core mission, curriculum, theme, and/or teaching method and to control its own budget and hire teachers and staff. In return for this freedom, a charter school must attract students and produce positive results within five years or its charter will not be renewed.

### **What is Montessori?**

The Montessori method of teaching addresses the whole child and was developed more than 100 years ago by Dr. Maria Montessori. Montessori education is characterized by an emphasis on self-directed activity on the part of the child and observation on the part of the teacher (often called a *director*, *directress*, or *guide*). It stresses the importance of adapting the child's learning environment to his or her developmental level, and of the role of physical activity in absorbing abstract concepts and practical skills. It is also characterized by the use of self-correcting materials for introduction and learning of various concepts.

### **Can I visit the school?**

Yes, prospective parents and educators alike are invited to observe in our classrooms. Observations take place during students' extended work period. They are for adults only and may be scheduled by calling the office at 978-465-0065.

### **How many classrooms do you have?**

River Valley has a full-day kindergarten program, called Kinderhaus, which consists of two classrooms of five-year-olds with a lead teacher and an assistant teacher. We have four lower elementary classrooms (E1) and four upper elementary (E2) classrooms, each with approximately 25 students. In each elementary classroom, there is a lead teacher and an assistant teacher. E1 classes are comprised of grades one to three combined, and E2 classes consist of grades four to six. Our Middle School program serves students in grades seven and eight, with teachers for individual subject areas.

### **What is your maximum enrollment?**

Per our charter, River Valley may enroll up to 288 students in grades K through eight.

### **How can I enroll my child at River Valley Charter School?**

Any child who is of age and a Massachusetts resident may apply to River Valley, and there is no application fee. Enrollment takes place through a lottery each February for possible entrance during the following school year. Each fall, we have openings for approximately 32 new five-year-old children in our Kinderhaus and potentially a few openings in the other age groups up through our Middle School program. In the lottery, applications are selected in a ranked order for entrance into the school. When there are more applicants than openings in a given age group, the additional names are maintained on wait lists. The categories of wait lists are:

- \*Sibling Wait List: applicants who are siblings of current students
- \*General Wait List: applicants from our chartered region (Amesbury, Newbury, Newburyport, Salisbury, and West Newbury)
- \*Non-Resident Wait List: residents of Massachusetts out of chartered region

### **If my child is placed on the wait list, do I need to reapply to keep them on the list?**

No. Students stay on the wait list until they receive an offer for enrollment. If a child applies for kindergarten and does not get in during their kindergarten year, they will remain on the wait list as it rolls over to grade one the following year. But, if a student should receive an offer for enrollment and decline, he or she is then removed from the wait list and must reapply to be considered at a later date.

### **How are Commonwealth charter schools funded?**

For each child that a Commonwealth charter school enrolls, it receives a tuition amount from the state equal to a per-pupil amount calculated by the Department's School Finance Unit. The state then deducts the same amount from the sending district's (school district pertaining to the municipality in which the student resides) state aid account. Like other public schools, Commonwealth charter schools are eligible to receive federal and state grant funds. Commonwealth charter schools may apply for private grants and receive contributions.

### **Is there a tuition fee?**

No. River Valley is a public school and students attend tuition-free.

### **Does River Valley Charter School serve students with special needs?**

Yes. Charter schools cannot discriminate in admissions on the basis of special need or English language proficiency. Once admitted, students who are special needs or English language learners must be appropriately identified, assessed, and served in accordance with federal and state requirements. For special education, this requires a full- or part-time special education administrator and additional staff to meet the needs of student's Individual Education Programs.

### **What do the state curriculum frameworks and state tests mean for charter schools?**

All public schools, including charter schools, must administer the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) tests. These tests are based on the curriculum frameworks adopted by the Board of Education. As a public Montessori school, our challenge is to remain faithful to the Montessori philosophy while meeting the requirements placed on all Massachusetts public schools. River Valley Charter School maintains a highly-qualified, Montessori-trained faculty and adheres to the Montessori tradition in its teaching and learning activities, while its students consistently score well on national and state-level standardized tests.

### **When does school begin and end each day?**

School begins at 8:30 a.m. and ends at 3:10 p.m. Kinderhaus students follow the same schedule.

### **Is transportation provided for students?**

Transportation is provided for Newburyport residents only. Registration for bus service takes place through the Newburyport Superintendent's office, and a fee is charged for a yearly bus pass. All others must be dropped off and picked up by parents. Many families form carpools to make this process easier.

### **Do you offer subjects such as music, art, physical education and language?**

Students participate in art, music and physical education classes each week. In addition, children have the opportunity to join any of several band and chorus groups and also have the opportunity to take private lessons. Due to budget constraints, we are no longer able to provide a foreign language program but hope to be able to do so in the future.

### **Do you have a lunch program?**

Because of our small size, River Valley does not offer a federal hot lunch program or have a cafeteria. Students bring lunches from home and eat in their own classrooms. They are encouraged to bring healthy food choices and to minimize trash by using Tupperware-type containers for lunches. River Valley Charter School, through our Business Office, provides a lunch to any child that requires nourishment during the school day.

### **How do children adapt once they leave your school after eighth-grade?**

We track the accomplishments of our graduate students, and they are quite impressive. Our students go on to attend both public and private high schools, and they are very often leaders among their peers. Some of River Valley's earliest students have gone on to successful college careers at prestigious universities around the country.

### **Are parents able to volunteer at the school?**

Yes. Each River Valley family is encouraged to volunteer at least 40 hours of volunteer service to the school each year. From driving on field trips to reading with children in the classroom, there are many ways in which parents can participate.