

**The Learning Lab at Village Montessori and Preparatory School (VMPS)  
2020-2021 School Year  
1520 Onyx Ridge  
Fort Mill, SC 29708**

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This document will cover:

The Situation and Solution

A Day at The Learning Lab

Admissions, Tuition, and Fees for The Learning Lab

**Section 1: The Situation and Solution**

The latest CDC guidelines and SC Department of Education Guidance and Recommendations will cause the public school experience to look and feel very different in 2020-2021. Even if Model 1 “Traditional” Scheduling is implemented, staggered start times and planning for potential self-isolation periods at home are recommended. If Model 2 “Hybrid” Scheduling is implemented, AM/PM or alternating days would cause the need for parents to facilitate their child’s e-learning at home. This of course causes a childcare problem for dual-working households. It is also not favorable to parents who do not feel equipped to facilitate their child’s e-learning. If everything remains the same as the previous school year, many parents are still concerned about the possibility of COVID-19 spreading amongst students in already crowded schools and/or about the possibility of a second wave of cases that could cause schools to close again. This would place parents back in the unwanted position of managing their student’s e-learning and/or would cause another disruption in their workday.

A group of Fort Mill parents collaborated with Lisa Gerard, owner of Village Montessori and Preparatory School, to develop a hybrid option of in-classroom and online learning for grades 1-6 (and possibly older if there is interest) with a smaller, more manageable class size. VMPS is about to begin its eighth year serving the Fort Mill and surrounding communities of Tega Cay, Rock Hill, South Charlotte, York, Indian Land, and Ballantyne. The school is a licensed child care center, which already offers private

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kindergarten, and has a reputation for providing a loving environment and preparing students well for elementary school through its combined Montessori and Balanced Literacy curriculum. The school embraces and welcomes all children as it is religiously and ethnically diverse, although its owner is Christian and teaches Christian values.

The school's inclusivity is evidenced through Ms. Gerard's non-profit service in Haiti, frequent celebrations of African American and Indian heritage and holidays and the diversity of its students and staff. VMPS also offered an early elementary program through 2019 but discontinued it due to an increase in preschool enrollment. VMPS offers afterschool and summer camp programs for preschoolers and elementary students, both on-site and virtual.

After researching South Carolina online public and charter school programs, as well as private online school programs, an effort led by Sara D'Amico, who is an experienced teacher and frequent FMSD substitute teacher, Ms. Gerard and Ms. D'Amico decided to partner to offer The Learning Lab at VMPS beginning in August 2020. The team has decided upon South Carolina Connections Academy (SCCA) as the online platform of the program. Ms. D'Amico will serve as Lead Learning Coach and Ms. Gerard will provide an Assistant Learning Coach. VMPS has a history of attracting certified teachers and is poised to hire an additional teacher should the enrollment warrant it. The program will offer a 12:1 student-teacher ratio. In addition to the learning coaches, Ms. Gerard will provide the use of Village Montessori classrooms, furniture and materials, and school buses for field trips. Students will also have full access to enrichment offerings of Spanish, STEAM, art education, music, gardening, and yoga.

Enrollment in the online school allows the flexibility to complete assignments from anywhere with WiFi access (on vacation, extended weekend travel, at home) and provides continuity should a student need to continue their online learning remotely for an extended period of time (during a pandemic, during an extended illness or during a lengthy trip overseas). There is a minimum of 25 hours of school work each week. Attendance at VMPS is not required for all 25 hours of the learning week but the learning coach is responsible for reporting attendance to SCCA and therefore, the parent or another appointed learning coach must fill in to meet the required 25 hours of learning should the child miss days of school. The school hours of 9am-3pm Monday through Friday will afford students the best opportunity to complete their assignments, take part in enrichment activities, and enjoy a school setting with their friends, so it is highly recommended to attend VMPS regularly, but not required.

This solution has many benefits. To summarize, students benefit from an online program that offers:

- Flexibility - students can learn from anywhere with WiFi and view recorded videos if they miss the live lesson
- Consistency - if there is a second wave of COVID-19, students aren't switching between one type of instruction to another and their schedule remains the same
- Facilitation by a certified teacher/learning coach vs. parents having to miss work or being forced to take on the role of learning coach
- And from a school environment that offers:
- A community of learners - a close-knit classroom with a mixed-age environment to offer children the opportunity to lead others, be role models for younger children, learn from older children
- Enrichment and in-classroom lessons - these will enhance the online learning experience and it's built-in unlike a homeschool option, which requires parents to seek out enrichment opportunities
- Classrooms and resources - a designated place to learn, materials, buses for field trips, outdoor play space (with gaga ball pit and full-sized basketball goal)
- Qualified support staff and established procedures - all teachers and subs at VMPS meet state and federal requirements for background checks and fingerprints; enrollment, billing, and report card procedures are well-established

## **Section 2: The Learning Lab Day**

The school day will be 9am-3pm Monday through Friday at VMPS. It will follow the school calendar of SCCA, as required. Before school and after school care are also available. The 2020-2021 SCCA school calendar has not yet been published, but parents are welcome to take a look at the [2019-2020 School Calendar](#).

There will be an online portion of each day, where students will use laptops and have access to grade specific online teachers that teach "live" core subjects. Students will be engaged in 5 hours each day of learning/school work, with approximately 20-25% of that time being online activities (for the lower grades). They will not be staring at a screen all day! The higher the grade level, the more online content to complete. An example of live instruction could be Live Math Monday, Live Reading Tuesday, etc. Different grades will offer different schedules and the Learning Coach will assist the child in staying on pace. Schedules with times for live classes are not yet published for

the 2020-2021 school year. There will be work in each subject everyday, with only one grade-specific live class daily, Monday through Thursday. Fridays will be more flexible with opportunities for elective classes/enrichment and field trips.

Students will work independently on their assignments with support from on-site Learning Coaches as needed to complete the assignments.

A parent must be listed as the primary learning coach because the parent is responsible for providing all personal information for enrollment and testing purposes. However, Ms. D'Amico should be listed as an alternate learning coach. The job of the on-site Learning Coach will be to facilitate instruction between SCCA online teachers and students and communicate as needed with each child's SCCA online teachers and parents, while providing a nurturing, safe classroom setting.

Students will have access to their online teachers via phone call, web mail, or during live class sessions. Students also have an opportunity for a monthly phone call with their online teacher to discuss performance. Parents can request a conference as needed with their child's SCCA teachers and/or VMPS Learning Coach.

### **Section 3. Admissions, Tuition, and Fees for The Learning Lab**

An in-person evaluation of each child will be performed by VMPS staff members to satisfy the admission requirements of The Learning Lab. Considerations will be made for each child's social, emotional, and academic levels. VMPS is not equipped with a special education department or behavior interventionist to best meet the needs of certain known diagnoses. Parents should disclose all special needs and necessary modifications required by their child at the time of application to the hybrid program. Failure to make disclosures at the time of enrollment can lead to a student being denied enrollment. Students in the hybrid program will be working in a tight-knit community of a classroom and it will not be an environment conducive to disruptive behavior.

If VMPS feels that they cannot best meet the needs of an individual child, application to the hybrid program can be denied. This does not have any bearing on a student's ability to apply and attend an online school separately from the hybrid learning program being offered at VMPS. For various reasons a student may not be admitted to The Learning Lab. This program is offered by VMPS, which is a private company, and can make admission decisions at their sole discretion. However, any child that meets

the criteria to enroll in an online school can do so on their own volition, despite admittance to The Learning Lab at VMPS. All applicants to VMPS can be considered from the date of application until the deadline of July 31, 2020. Parents of accepted students must submit proof of SCCA enrollment to [info@villagemontessori.com](mailto:info@villagemontessori.com) by July 31, 2020. At that time, VMPS will send a welcome email to the parents of the enrolled student with required VMPS forms. These forms must be completed and scanned/emailed back to VMPS by August 7th, 2020 or acceptance to VMPS can be rescinded and offered to another student.

Upon acceptance to The Learning Lab, parents agree to pay the non-refundable enrollment fee of \$120 and 1/10th the annual facilitation fee (\$532), which is also non-refundable. The on-site facilitation fee is \$5,320 per year/per student, which can be paid in a lump sum for a 3% discount if paid by check or can be paid monthly in 10 equal payments of \$532 per month. Each accepted student will be required to have a VMPS required Macbook and headphones for participation in the program that meet [SCCA Technology Requirements](#). (VMPS requires a Macbook for screen mirroring capabilities in the classroom via Apple TV.) There is a \$500 flat enrichment/field trip fee paid once annually on July 31st per student. After school care is offered for an additional \$3600 per school year. Full-time enrollment (7am-6pm) costs \$11,090 per school year.

Some offers of admission will take place prior to the application deadline of July 31st while others will take more consideration. All students that have made full application by the application deadline of July 31st, will know their standing within five business days or by Monday, August 3rd, whichever is sooner. At this time, not more than 20 students will be accepted to The Learning Lab for the 2020-2021 school year. Should a waiting pool develop, VMPS will consider providing a second classroom for up to 18 students.

The students that have applied and are not accepted for the opening year of the program will be placed in a waiting "pool." If ever a spot comes available in the classroom throughout the school year, students can be offered admission from the waiting pool. This is different from a waitlist, as students can be chosen in any order, as seen fit by VMPS. Keep in mind we are trying to create a classroom of learners that work well together. Students that are not admitted can re-apply for the program in the future.

Participation in The Learning Lab will be re-evaluated annually and students may be released from the program at the sole discretion of VMPS. However, release from The Learning Lab does not constitute release from enrollment in their online school.

*Notes about SCCA:*

*\*VMPS is facilitating the learning of students who are enrolled at SCCA and has SCCA's full support to offer their platform at its facility, however, VMPS is not affiliated with nor is in a partnership with SCCA.*

*\*VMPS CANNOT and WILL NOT decline acceptance to SCCA.*

*\*VMPS will make admission decisions to The Learning Lab being offered for the 2020-2021 school year at their sole discretion.*