



Understanding the Commitment Fee

What is it?

The commitment fee is a one-time payment of \$1000 dollars in addition to a child's tuition and registration fees, which is held in trust by Phoenix, until the child's final year of Casa. At this time, it is applied to re-registration for tuition of that year. Phoenix implemented the commitment fee in the year 2014 in order to encourage families to allow their children to complete the Montessori primary program. The completion of the Montessori primary program, Casa and anything that proceeds it.

What is the child's 'final year'?

Normally we say that a child's third year is final or graduating year in Casa, but this is very unclear and not always accurate. Depending on when your child's birthday falls they will move out of the other pre-Casa environments and into the Casa at varying times in the calendar year. For example, a child born in January 2018 will likely move into YCC around June of the following year (2019) and then Casa of the year following that (2020). That means that they turn six in the calendar year 2024 and therefore their final year in Casa would be the 2023-2024 school year. Their graduation would take place in June 2024 and the child would then move into either Elementary year one or grade one at another school in September 2024. This means that this particular child has spent around 4 years in the Casa environment, rather than 3. A child with the same birthday that enrolls to start in Casa (rather than Nido or YCC) would start in September 2020 - January 2021, and they would therefore spend around 3 to 3.5 years in the Casa before graduating.

Montessori Education from birth to age six

The Montessori pedagogy is based on the on a four-plane theory of development that says that human beings, as a result of physical and chemical changes, have different needs which manifest themselves approximately every six years. The first six years of life (infancy) are known as a fire plane as there are many things that occur during this time frame that turn a helpless infant into a walking, talking, independent child. Montessori stated that education must support these stages of human development, and therefore outlined a system of learning to help realize this. She is most famous for her primary programming which is widely known as the "Montessori Method."

The outlined method prioritizes the idea of preparing the environment in order to meet the developmental needs of the child. This "prepared environment" she normally refers to in her writings is the Montessori Casa, but also applies to any space in which a child may spend an extended period of time.

The prepared environment of the child includes but is not limited to:

- A prepared adult(s) - one who is trained in the development of children and specifically in the Montessori method
- Child-sized furniture and objects
- Developmentally appropriate materials (designed by Montessori and those who worked closely with her)
- Attractive elements
- Freedom (within limits): to move, choose, associate, work, observe, rest, etc.
- Has consequences (i.e. if something falls it might break)

- Free from clutter and distractions (nothing that the child won't use for a purpose related to development)

Each of the Nido, YCC and Casa environments is prepared in a different way to meet the developmental needs of children within these age ranges (0-18 months; 18 months-2.5 years and 2.5 years- 6 years), but they all work in the same way – the child begins at one point, grows and changes based on their interactions with the environment and then is ready to transition into the next environment. At Phoenix the transitions between these three levels is seamless and not based on a particular calendar date. The transitions are planned for based roughly on the child's birthday and anticipated developmental milestones, but there is some flexibility. The final transition from Casa into Elementary occurs after the child moves into the second plane of development which occurs around the age of six. The elementary environment differs greatly from that of the three previous environments as a new child has emerged and they have different needs which are reflected in a new prepared environment.

Why does my child need to finish their Casa cycle?

When a child is enrolled at Phoenix a spot is saved for them from their start date, until the end of their first plane of development, so depending on when the child starts this can be up to six cycles of registration. Of course, we hope that all children entering into the second plane of development (grade one and beyond) will stay at Phoenix as long as possible, but we understand that this is not always an option for a variety of reasons. During our intake process we make it a priority in the administration to help families to understand that we plan for their child to stay here until the year they turn six and therefore they must do this also. We are committed to your child being offered and receiving a classical Montessori education and therefore we ask that our families commit to us by remaining for the entirety of the programing. By completing the Casa cycle the child is ensuring that:

- They have an opportunity to use all of the physical and mental skills they have been developing since birth
- They are able to benefit from all of the indirect and direct preparation that came as a result of their work in their previous environments
- Work with the full range of Montessori materials that have been visually available to them from the time they entered the classroom
- Work at their own pace, according to their own developmental needs and abilities
- Look up to older children as role models
- Be a role model to younger children
- Ensure that the three-year age mix in the class is preserved (an even split of first, second and third/fourth year children)
- Develop relationships with caregivers over longer periods of time

Issues that occur when a child does not complete their Casa cycle

1. The room is out of balance – the room requires an even split of first, second and third year children in order to maintain an ideal equilibrium. Classrooms that have a larger portion of children in one age grouping do not work well because children within a specific age range have the same needs and therefore would be working with the same materials and require the same presentations from the guiding adult. The even split ensures that the younger children have an array of older children to watch and learn from and that they older children have had may opportunities to practice skills so that they have an opportunity to teach (both directly and indirectly) younger children. This is so important on a confidence level because children learn the most effectively from their peers, and older children get a lot of satisfaction from being able to assist others.

This also affects the school's ability to be accredited by regulating Montessori bodies, as it is one of the requirements that a Casa classroom have a three-year age mix, in order to be deemed "authentic."

2. Their spot cannot be filled – because the Montessori pedagogy is based on a development system of learning that requires a lot of indirect preparation (presentations which prepare the child by allowing them to practice skills in a pared down way that will make them successful for future presentations/work), children are not usually admitted into the Casa program past their first year (unless they have previous Montessori experience from another school). Therefore, the spot that we have saved for the child since registration is now vacant for a period of one or two years. Yes, it can technically be ‘filled’ by a younger child, but then problems as outlined in the previous bullet can occur.

3. The child does not have an opportunity to work with all/most of the Montessori materials – the materials in the classroom build on each other, one in preparation for the next. They require physical and mental skills that meet the needs of the child in a particular stage of development, whilst preparing them for where they might go next. In the earlier months and years of the Casa, the child works very hard to prepare their bodies and minds in order to tackle traditional educational skills like reading, writing and arithmetic – they do this through their work with Practical Life, Sensorial and early language activities. A child who cannot concentrate or hold a pencil will not be able to write with any success. The earlier materials prepare for this on all levels. We want the child to be successful (yet challenged) when we offer new concepts, so that they feel confident when they encounter future challenges whether they be educational or otherwise. When to present something is very precarious. Too soon and they may be overwhelmed and avoid it in the future, too late and they may be underwhelmed or bored by the idea. The prepared adult must observe the child and decide what and when on a day to day basis. Children who leave early get lots and lots of indirect preparation which will never be realized because they haven’t finished exploiting the offerings of the perfectly prepared Casa environment.

What happens if my child does not complete their final year of Casa?

- You lose your \$1000 commitment fee
- You have broken your commitment to the school
- You affect your child’s classroom
- You will not be offered a space for any future child who may be eligible for enrollment