The Acorn School provides a Whole Child (mind, body, spirit) approach to early childhood care and education. Inspired by social-constructivist systems thinking theories, educators know that children’s conceptual understandings emerge through their engagement with the world. The program is PLAY-based with an Emergent Curriculum.
All children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, and responsive interactions.

(Webster-Stratton, 1999)

The Acorn School care practice strives to be nurturing and respectful, and to reflect the high priority VCFC places on the value for both the individual and the community. We care to know and be known by one another, and activities reflect this purpose. As we grow in our understanding, our differences are our strength.
Play

“Play is often talked about as if it is relief from serious learning. But for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood.”

- Fred Rogers

The Acorn School teaching practice reflects the research-based understanding that play is essential to children’s health and well-being, and foundational to children’s construction of knowledge. The design of the learning environment privileges long periods of uninterrupted time for children to play indoors and outside.
Emergent Curriculum

The Acorn School emergent curriculum requires teachers to hold an image of the child as someone actively seeking knowledge.

To guide our teaching practice, the teacher must actively observe and identify the interests and needs of the child, as each child we teach is unique.

The learning environment is designed by teachers and reflects their observation of the play schemas of children, demonstrating that activities responsive to children’s interests provide meaningful learning opportunities.
Well Child

The Acorn School is licensed as a Well Child program by the Tennessee Department of Human Services. Children must be able to engage in the daily rhythm of the Acorn School program to attend. Parent partnership is necessary to comply with the Well Child Policies.

Parents assess their child’s health and wellness before arriving at the child care center. If upon arrival teachers identify that the child is not well enough to attend, the child will be sent home with the parent.

These policies are defined in The Parent Handbook in an effort to protect the health and safety of all children enrolled in the program.
Strategies VCFC has in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19

- Families will at all times observe the VCFC Well Child policies.
- Parents use hand sanitizer before touching the keypad and entering the building.
- Temperatures are taken in the childcare lobby before individuals enter the classroom; children with a temperature registering 100 degrees or higher will be excluded from care that day.
- Staff and children implement hand washing before and after eating and after toileting.
- Any individual ages 2 years and older may choose to wear a mask. VCFC may return to required mask wearing if there is a university policy change that directs this action.
- Children that test positive will be excluded from childcare for 10 days while they isolate at home. (The child may return earlier if they test negative test on the 6th day.)
- Parents and staff will promptly report COVID-19 positive test results to their site director and follow the directions on https://www.vanderbilt.edu/healthwellness/public-health/covid19/
Infant Program

Through primary routines for nutrition, diapering, and sleep, children and adults forge a nurturing, respectful bond that empowers the child’s growth, learning, and development.

Adults have influence over and responsibility for children’s developing self-concept by the way they engage with, speak to, and respond to children.
Toddler Program  (12 months by August 2022)

Young learners newly mobile are excited to explore the world with all five senses.

With gentle coaching from nurturing teachers, children learn to manage big feelings and engage successfully with peers.
All humans want to feel respect and self-worth and a sense of belonging which occurs in coordination with primary routines, classroom activities and the design of the learning environment.

Twos is often the age when children begin to recognize that they have control over their bodies and they develop important mastery through milestones such as toilet training.
Preschool Program
(36 months by August 2022)

The Acorn School design is to provide a rigorous learning environment for children to have consistent opportunities with peers for collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking.

By perceiving children as curious, competent and capable of self-control, and honoring their interests and needs, adults will enable children to explore their big ideas, solve problems, and respond to others with kindness and empathy.

Children are often in the Acorn preschool program for multiple years - through the year before Kindergarten.
K-Camp

K-Camp is a transformative nature education summer program for PreK children entering elementary school.

K-Camp provides rising kindergartners an opportunity to confront change through the joyful adventure of exploring the buildings and grounds of Vanderbilt University with risk and rigor!
Parent Partnership

The Acorn School recognizes the pivotal role parents play in their child’s education, honoring the parent as the child’s first teacher. Through consistent and respectful verbal and written communication, parents and early childhood educators strengthen their relationship, united to support a shared understanding of the unique child.

Specific activities include:

- Teacher Meet and Greet
- Back to School Night
- Bi-annual conferences
- Week of the Young Child.

Parents may also:

- support surveys
- hiring panels

These foundational relationships contribute to a positive school climate.
Nature Education

Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and intellectual development (Kellert, 2005). Licensing requires outside play every day that the temperature registers between 32 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Acorn School welcomes children in play clothes with insect repellant and sunscreen applied at home by parents (teachers will reapply sunscreen by noon and as needed.)
Collegial Partnerships

The Acorn School values lifelong learning and adult education. Through an established partnership with the Peabody School of Education and Human Development, The Acorn School serves as a site for observation and training and provides research opportunities to values-aligned proposals that may inform individual child well-being as well as ongoing assessment for program quality in the field of early childhood education.

VCFC is proud to partner with the Vanderbilt’s Next Steps program to provide career development training through ECE apprenticeships paired with an Acorn Mentor Teacher sponsored by a grant from the Department of Labor.
Transition

Children are required to be signed into school no later than 10:00 AM to benefit from a rigorous learning environment (an exception will be made for pediatric appointments, but please call ahead.)

Parents must sign-in on the Brightwheel app and check-in verbally and visually with the teacher at both Drop-off and Pick-up times.

Parents are encouraged to create a strong and consistent drop off routine that supports your child’s transition into the classroom each day. Adults anticipate big emotions as part of the child’s transition process understanding that it is developmentally appropriate for a child to take 3-12 weeks to acclimate to a new classroom community, depending on the individual’s unique temperament. The Acorn School partners with families as they navigate this adjustment period.
FAQ’s

The Acorn School is open twelve months a year Monday - Friday from 7:30 AM - 5:30 PM

Online payment of tuition is required through the Brightwheel app. This is paid via a withdrawal from bank account or credit card automatically on the first of each month.

The New School Year begins August 8, 2022 and ends July 28, 2023. Classroom Open House is August 5th. There will be an on site and a Zoom option. This opportunity allows parents to meet their child's teacher, and tour the classroom.

The Acorn School is closed on the following holidays observed by Vanderbilt:

- Labor Day*
- Thanksgiving
- Day after Thanksgiving
- Vanderbilt University Winter Break
- New Year’s Day
- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day

(*VCFC may provide childcare to university employees required to work on Labor Day 2022, if VU classes are in session. As in prior years, enrolled university families will be surveyed to assess this need)

Additional dates of closure for teacher in-service:
August 1 - 5, 2022; March 13, 2023.

The Acorn School will close on any additional Chancellor holidays if and as these are announced.

There is no tuition proration for dates of closure or child absences (including due to COVID.)
The Acorn School admits children through rolling enrollment twelve months per year as age match (child’s date of birth) spots become identified and made available.

VU families are allowed one right of refusal when offered a spot in The Acorn School before being moved to the end of the wait list. The majority of spots will become available for an August 8, 2022 start date, families will be informed of an age-eligible spot for this start date and per ongoing availability on or after April 2022.

To secure the offered spot the following mandatory steps must be completed:

One parent/guardian must attend a mandatory orientation

To commit to the spot, parent/guardian emails Linda Wilson, Administrative Officer with decision (failure to submit this within 2 business days after orientation results in forfeit of spot)

If you would like to schedule an optional tour, please contact Linda Wilson

Parent/guardian must submit a completed enrollment packet at least five business days prior to the child's first day of school (due by July 1st if child begins program August 8th)

The New School Year begins August 8, 2022 and ends July 28, 2023