



The Acorn School

AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

Parent Handbook

2020-2021



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WELCOME

This handbook is designed to inform families of the policies and procedures of The Acorn School at Vanderbilt University that are implemented in support of children's healthy development, to comply with licensure rules for child care agencies, and to enable a successful home to school partnership.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

Executive Director	615-322-8074
Administrative Officer	615-875-8159
18 th Avenue Child Care Center	615-322-5332
19 th Avenue Child Care Center	615-322-1083
Edgehill Child Care Center	615-322-8076

THE ACORN SCHOOL VISION

Our commitment to innovative teaching in early childhood education is founded upon a vision for dynamic learning community. The Acorn School embraces children's infinite capacity for wonder and discovery. Quality learning experiences reflect the unique development of the individual supported by qualified educators to help each person to reach their full potential.

- Children are viewed as capable, competent, and curious citizens of the world possessing the ability to construct their own knowledge.
- Parents are partners in their child's education and engage in activities which enhance their understanding of their child's development.
- VCFC's early childhood educators demonstrate that they are lifelong learners by engaging in professional learning plans that enhance the quality of The Acorn School, as well as support their individual learning and development.
- VCFC engages with the Peabody School of Education and Human Development, positioning The Acorn School as a site for observation and training, providing research opportunities to students and faculty, and benefiting from the content derived from these activities that informs high quality Early Childhood Care and Education.

STATEMENT OF SERVICE

The Acorn School offers early childhood education and licensed care to Vanderbilt full-time employees who are benefits-eligible, post-doctoral scholars, and to full time degree-seeking students, for their children ages 6 weeks through 6 years.

Waiting List priority is given to siblings of enrolled children.

VCFC currently leases spaces per a service level agreement (SLA) in the VU child care centers to VUMC Child and Family Centers through June 30, 2020. Through an additional SLA, VCFC will retain VUMC-affiliated PK students (and their siblings) in limited spaces through July 2021. For more information contact Kinyata McGee-Swope at kinyata.mcgee-swope@vumc.org or visit the VUMC CFC website at <https://hr.vumc.org/cfc>

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The Acorn School provides a Whole Child (mind, body, spirit) approach to early childhood care and education. Our programs reflect the research-based understanding that play is essential to children’s health and well-being, and foundational to children’s learning. The Acorn School supports children to create their own knowledge through hands-on experiences and child-initiated play. Teachers nurture children, providing encouragement, protection, security, stimulation, and supervision, and an Emergent Curriculum.

The Acorn School philosophy of Education is inspired by social-constructivist systems thinking theories, including the work of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, Howard Gardner, and Loris Malaguzzi, that emphasize the collaborative nature of learning. Conceptual understandings emerge through a child’s direct engagement with the world. Through primary relationships, shared language and concepts become the tools which children use to absorb social practices and construct their understanding of themselves and their community.

CHILD CARE PROGRAM QUALITY

The Acorn School engages in ongoing program quality improvement informed by metrics developed by and for the field of Early Childhood Care and Education.

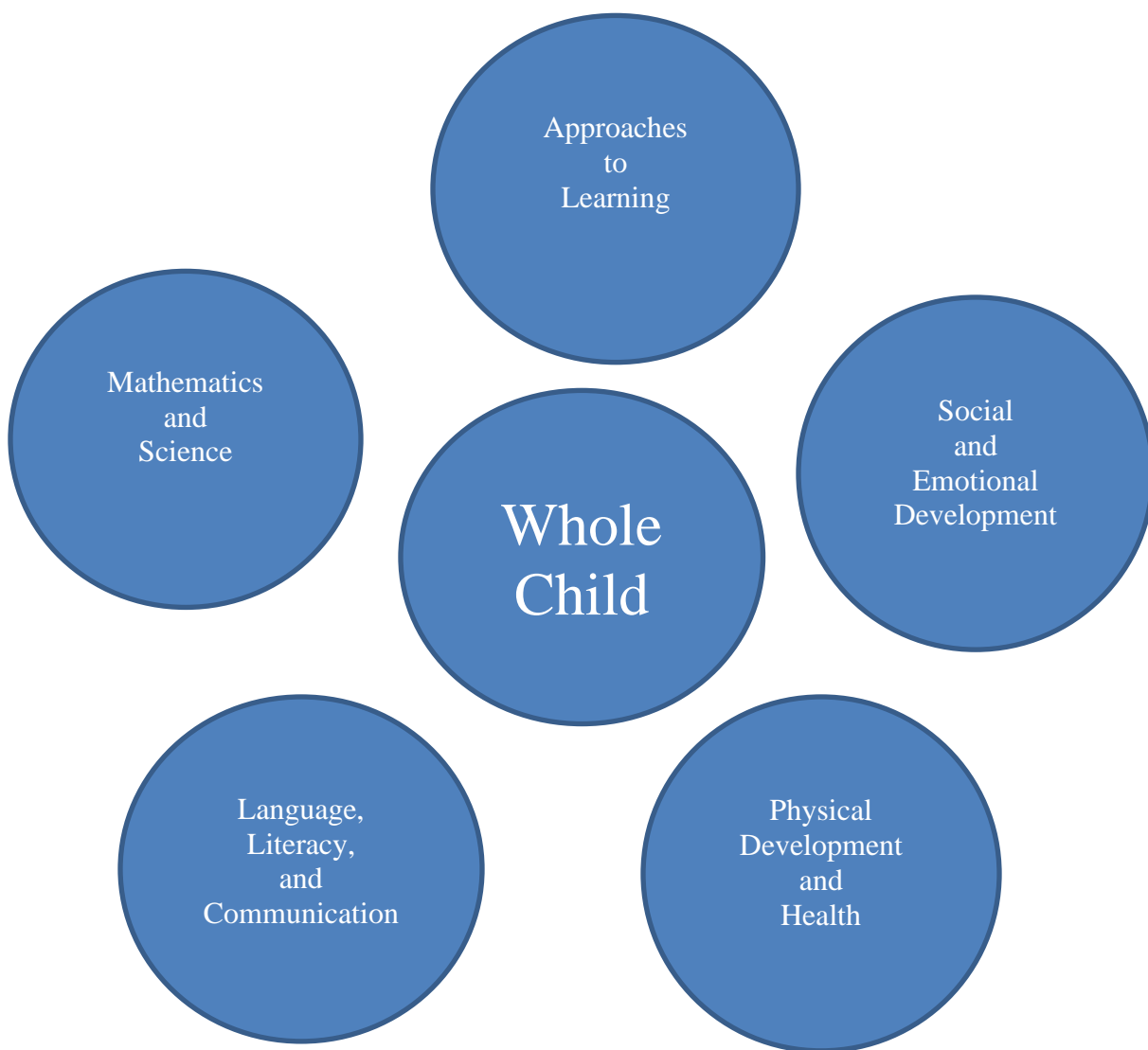
An example of this is the Star-Quality Child Care Program in Tennessee (tnstarquality.org) - a voluntary program that recognizes child care agencies who exceed minimum licensing standards with a rating of 1 – 3 stars. Currently all three sites are evaluated annually by the Star-Quality program by an independent observer from the TN Child Care Resource & Referral network using the ITERS and ECERS tools (www.ersi.info) to inform the rating.

COMMUNICATION

The Acorn School requires parents to stay informed about their classroom and center to ensure compliance with updated policy and procedures. To support communication for understanding, the following tools and strategies are in place:

- **VCFC Website**
<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/child-family-center/>
- **Electronic Communication**
This provides parents with classroom information directly by text or email. The current tool is Tadpoles. Participation is strongly encouraged by administration to support parents with classroom updates.
- **ECE Events**
Families meet to provide an opportunity for parent engagement. Content may include a Parent Education topic, a special assembly for Parent-Child engagement, or simple potlucks.
- **Parent Conferences**
Parents meet with their child's teacher for a 30 minute conference two times each year. This important opportunity to discuss the child's growth and learning directly with the teacher is foundational to establishing a respectful and effective partnership. Parent-teacher communication is the primary co-held responsibility for families and teachers and strengthens their relationship and understanding. Additional conferences may be scheduled.
- **Social Media**
@VanderbiltCFC Please follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter!
- **Verbal Exchange**
Parents and teachers exchange greetings during sign in and sign out transitions and convey essential information. Longer conversations are scheduled for when the teacher is not directly supervising children.
- **Written Communication**
Bulletin and Electronic Boards, Documentation Panels, Incident Reports, Classroom Newsletters, Site Director Newsletters, VCFC's Quarterly

Five Domains of Young Children's Development and Learning



RESPECTFUL EARLY EDUCATION

Children grow from the head down and the torso out. As active learners, play is critical to their healthy growth and development. *The five domains of a child's development are interrelated and interdependent.* The design of the learning environment supports peer engagement, encourages movement, and provides developmentally appropriate activities reflecting a multi-disciplinary approach to learning through play. Emergent curriculum is child-initiated and teacher-framed.

APPROACHES TO LEARNING

How children construct and apply their knowledge, through curiosity, exploration, initiative, participation, persistence, reasoning, resilience, and self-organization.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Children develop an identity of self, expression of feelings, empathy, emotional regulation, impulse control, interaction with and relationship to adults and peers, and create a foundation for social understanding.

PHYSICAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

As the child grows and develops, the body becomes more capable and competent through the integration of:

- Perceptual development – exploring the world with all five senses (e.g., mouthing a block, patting a ball, examining faces, listening to rain, tasting a new fruit).
- Fine motor development – touching, grasping, and manual manipulation, requires increasing dexterity and precision (e.g., grabbing keys, grasping a crayon, manipulating a pencil).
- Gross motor development – large movements requiring strength, coordination, and balance (e.g., crawling, standing, walking, pedaling a trike, pumping on a swing).
- Vestibular system – coordinates hand and eye movements, informs and supports balance and equilibrium.
- Proprioceptive – body positioning and spatial awareness, regulating sensory input.

LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND COMMUNICATION

- Receptive language – listening and understanding what others are communicating (e.g., identifying and discriminating sounds, recognizing voices, understanding intention and meaning).
- Expressive language – speech and other ways of expressing communication (e.g., gesturing, signing, babbling, speaking, drawing, scribbling, printing).
- Interest in print – understanding that pictures and symbols (letters/words/sentences) communicate ideas and information (stories, recipes, directions, books); awareness of environmental print; understanding how books work (e.g., English language books open right to left and pages are read left to right and from top to bottom); evolution of scribbles; representing ideas in drawing, scribbles, and printing.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

- Describe and explore relationships among objects and materials.
- Develop skills and vocabulary to measure, pattern, and express order and position (e.g., number sense, properties and operations; shape dimension and geometric relationships).
- Observation, prediction, experimentation, and analysis through engagement with objects, materials, people, and other living things.

WINDOWS INTO LEARNING

The Acorn School engages children and parents in ongoing reflection of children's learning, utilizing audio and visual strategies of documentation. These include presentation panels inside and outside of the classroom that display the process of children's knowledge construction using artifacts, narrative, photographs, and work samples. Additionally, there are several activities embedded in The Acorn School program to support adult awareness of each child's individual development:

- Teachers maintain a portfolio for each child from date of entrance through K-Camp (or leaving date) that follows the child to each classroom and contains: anecdotal notes, photographs, and work samples.
- The Acorn School partners with the Peabody School of Education and Human Development's training of students to assess children's (ages two years and older) speech and language - this activity takes place at the beginning of the Fall semester. Parents receive this data and may choose to follow-up with their pediatrician.
- Parents complete the ASQ tool <https://agesandstages.com/about-asq/for-parents/> twice annually to support teachers to better understand the individual development of their child. Parent attendance at the Fall and Spring Parent Conferences is critical to observing, documenting, and discussing the child's strengths and needs.

RESEARCH

VCFC benefits from a relationship with the Peabody College of Education and Human Development. This relationship reflects VCFC's contribution as a university team member, and our commitment to Vanderbilt University's mission, goals, and values to be a center for scholarly research, informed and creative teaching, and service to the community and society at large. In addition to opportunities for shared training and professional development, The Acorn School provides access to the classrooms at each site for Peabody student and faculty observations. All guests will conduct themselves at the highest level of professionalism, and are background checked as required by DHS and Vanderbilt's compliance and standards.

The Acorn School is frequently a site for Vanderbilt faculty and student research, particularly research related to documenting and improving practices to help children learn. Parents may be contacted by Peabody and informed of opportunities to participate in research activities. These invitations will include an IRB reviewed informed consent form when necessary and appropriate.

OUTDOOR PLAY

Outdoor play and explorations are an important foundational learning experience for young children at The Acorn School. “Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and intellectual development.” (Kellert, 2005) Each child care center has a designated, age-appropriate playground. VCFC appreciates that our child care centers are located on Vanderbilt’s walkable campus with its unique and distinctive park setting and will take full advantage to engage the children with the public art, arboretum, and green open spaces.

DHS requires that licensed child care centers ensure that children receive an opportunity for outdoor play every day that the temperature registers between 32 and 95 degrees. Please send children in clothing appropriate for the weather, labeled with the child’s first and last name. During a light rain, we may take a walk, so a raincoat is advisable. On snowy days, please send boots, hats, gloves and layers of warm clothing. During the summer opportunities increase for water play. Children are advised to wear rubber-soled shoes with closed toes and heels with socks for outdoor excursions.

Parents will apply a thick coat of sunscreen to their child every morning before bringing them to child care, especially in the summer. Teachers will reapply sunscreen throughout the day as necessary. Parents may choose to use bug spray on the child by applying it at home.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

Children should wear washable play clothes that support their full range of movement. Children are advised to wear tread-soled shoes with closed toes and heels, with socks. Parents are encouraged to keep changes of clothes in their child’s cubby (two, please, for infants and toddlers) in case of accidents. Young children feel powerful and gain confidence as they learn to manage their clothing. Consider pull on (elastic waist) pants instead of overalls or waistbands with tricky fastenings. This is especially important when children are ready to begin independent toileting. Children may choose to be barefoot at school in which case teachers will support their decision as weather appropriate and in recognition of the consistent research that bare feet best supports young children’s physical development.

DHS licensing prohibits children from wearing necklaces (including amber teething beads) or any loose item (e.g., pacifier leash or clip) on their clothing.

TRANSITIONS

Child care “transition” is the morning drop-off routine parents establish with the teacher for their child, especially infants and toddlers, to feel soothed and confident as their care relationship is transferred from the parent to the teacher. Develop a drop-off ritual to say "good-bye" and reassure your child. This can be as simple as: hang up coat, wash hands, butterfly kiss and two hugs. A quick and consistent ritual with positive messaging is best. Coming back inside for another “one more hug” or sneaking out of the classroom creates a sense of mistrust in the child. Please know that children usually calm down before a parent reaches the parking lot! Children are capable of developing good management of their emotions given support, encouragement, and the opportunity. If teachers are concerned that your child is unable to be soothed in a reasonable amount of time, the Site Director will contact you for advice.

Transition may also refer to the child engaging with a new classroom and teaching team at The Acorn School. The majority of the children transition into a new classroom in August (some newly enrolled children may be accepted throughout the year as space becomes available.) Most children quickly adapt to a new classroom, especially if it is in the same child care center with familiar friends. Children are assigned to specific classrooms (based on their age by August 15th of the year), to conform to DHS requirements for group size and adult ratio in licensed child care.

Teachers Managing Transitions

Current teachers will collaborate with new teachers to support understanding of how to meet individual care needs. Care Plans and critical health information will be shared (such as management of allergies) before your child transitions.

The new teacher will have your child’s cubby labeled, and birthday board ready. The new teacher will provide new parents a copy of the classroom Daily Schedule, Lesson Plan, Newsletter, and Roster in the first week of your child’s attendance.

The current teacher will transfer your child’s cubby contents, personal possessions, and portfolio. The current teacher will support your child in the weeks ahead by positively discussing “what will be the same, what is different.” As opportunity presents itself, peers transitioning together may visit the new classroom together.

Parents Managing Transitions

Talk to your child about what to expect with the transition (e.g., “The Acorn School is a place where they get to play all day, learn new things, and make friends.”) A Meet and Greet is scheduled for Friday, August 7, 2020 from 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM to support each classroom community of children, parents and teachers to begin building positive relationships – families are encouraged to prioritize this event to set their child up for success.

When it comes to children and transition, be patient. Children's responses to separation and transition depend upon their age, temperament, and experiences. Teachers will quickly communicate any concerns and reach out to parents for support if they need it. Allow six full weeks before you assess the child's relationship to and experience of their new classroom and teaching team.

Be positive! Your attitude matters. Children have incredible intuition, they sense parent anxiety. Make sure you communicate to your child that everything is okay.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS

The Acorn School cannot assume responsibility or liability for any items brought from home that become lost or broken. The Acorn School provides sufficient learning materials and comfort supplies, including sheets and blankets. If your child has a favorite sleep toy or any other security item, please check first with the Site Director to make sure the item is allowed under DHS licensing regulation.

Items from home can support classroom learning. Please check first with your teacher if you would like to share a personal belonging that could enhance children's understanding; this may include an artifact, book, musical instrument, or photograph. The Acorn School asks parents to exercise caution when allowing children to bring personal items to class. Please check first with your child's teacher to see if there is a day designated for sharing such items. Please label all items brought from home to school. The Acorn School does not allow candy, cosmetics, gum, money, or toy weapons (or real weapons) at school.

Please be mindful of managing personal possessions and exercise care (such as when setting down a purse) to make sure contents are not accessible to children. This includes care taken with knowing what is in the hands and pockets of older siblings to ensure items that are choking hazards are not accidentally left in infant and toddler spaces. *To help manage this risk, parents are asked to drop older children off in their classrooms first.*

DISCIPLINE

The Acorn School embraces the definition of "discipline" as meaning "to teach." All human beings want to feel respect and self-worth and have a sense of belonging. The Acorn School does not punish children, we educate children. By honoring their interests and needs, adults will enable children to become capable, responsible, successful adults. Staff may never use any form of physical punishment when disciplining a child. Staff will not use language that humiliates and demeans children. The primary focus for teachers is to support young children's self-image as capable of self-control, verbal problem-solving, and responding to others with kindness and empathy.

The Acorn School follows a four step approach to discipline:

1. **MODEL:** Adults model pro-social behavior and appropriate language and demonstrate problem-solving and appropriate risk taking.
2. **PREVENT:** Adults prevent misbehavior through attentive, compassionate supervision, and through the design of the curriculum and the learning environment.
3. **COACH:** Adults help children to identify their feelings and redirect children to different activities if they have trouble exhibiting self-control to be safe with peers. Adults will coach by asking calmed children to identify what would have been a better decision.
4. **REPAIR:** Adults support children's reflection of events and behaviors and facilitate child-to-child conversation to name and acknowledge feelings and the actions that have impacted a peer's experience. Adults will encourage repair by inviting children to consider a positive action that demonstrates taking responsibility for the feelings and experience of the other person (or thing).
 - This might look like cleaning up a mess before moving on to play.
 - This might look like repairing a torn book or replacing a broken toy.
 - This might look like supporting first aid for a friend they injured by getting the ice pack.
 - Teachers will not encourage insincere apologies from children.
 - Parents will partner with teachers to ensure children complete tasks of repair (at home or at school before going home.)

CELEBRATIONS

Vanderbilt Child and Family Center honors families by focusing on the love that creates our familial ties. Teachers facilitate classroom discussions to support children's positive self-identity. In recognition of the varied configuration of our families, The Acorn School does not focus on "Mother's Day" and "Father's Day" as celebrations for parents, but we do hold playdate opportunities and family potlucks throughout the year as a way for all kinds of parents to know and be known by one another. Instead, The Acorn School wants to ensure that children and their parents see themselves reflected in our language, and in the broad array of literature that we display, read, and discuss.

The Acorn School seeks to honor the Whole Child by endeavoring to understand their beliefs, and to create dynamic spaces for sharing and learning culture balancing this with the understanding that quality Early Care and Education environments should offer respite to children and their families from the secular marketing frenzy that assaults all our senses during Holiday times.

The Acorn School will facilitate education about those holiday celebrations in which children express interest. Teachers will follow the child's lead and ensure that traditions valued by children are explored in a developmentally appropriate manner. This may look like families' contributing books, music, and other activities to share in the classroom that highlight their cultural traditions. Being child-led, the authenticity of these activities is ensured. Successful examples include:

- Exploring the similarity and differences in the symbol of light among different holiday traditions (Chanukah, Diwali, Kwanzaa, Santa Lucia)
- Making a papier mache dragon head and dancing for Moon Festival
- Painting sugar skulls for Dia de Los Muertos
- Using organic vegetable dyes for spring eggs (Easter and Pagan traditions)

VCFC will not allow religious proselytizing in The Acorn School.

Parents interested to support respectful sharing are invited to do the following:

- Email your Site Director with a proposal for a specific activity and relate this to how it ties to your family's culture and your child's specific interest.
- The Site Director will work with you and the classroom teachers to understand if this may be implemented in a developmentally appropriate and inclusive way that is respectful to all the families and staff in the classroom and supports established learning goals for the children.

NUTRITION

Parents provide 100% of the food offered to their child ages 6 weeks to 12 months (first birthday):

- Parents thereby control baby's exposure to new foods
- Parents provide bottles already made up, and labeled with the child's first and last name, to maintain parent responsibility for quality and portion.
- Bottles and foods will be warmed in a water bath (bottle warmer).
- Bottles and food containers will be sent home "dirty" so that parents can accurately gauge their child's intake and food preferences.
- Babies are held to feed until they can sit up at a table.
- Teachers facilitate hand washing before and after feedings.
- Teachers recognize that feedings are excellent curriculum and use these routines to intentionally bathe children in positive language to support children's social emotional, language and early literacy development.

The Acorn School provides children (at 12 months of age and older) with a hot lunch, and nutritious snacks in the morning and afternoon:

- Children are responsible for washing hands, sitting with feet on the floor, using a sippy cup or a cup, and trying new foods.
- Teachers sit with children to model courtesy and proper use of tools.
- Snack is a small group activity of 2 - 8 children with one teacher. Teachers will encourage every child age 12 months and older to attend snack, but children are not required to do so.
- Children are required to wash their hands and join the lunch table. Children are encouraged to try each food. No child will be forced to eat.
- Teachers recognize that meal time is an optimal curricular activity to reinforce children's small motor skills, language development, and pro-social engagement as they identify as part of a community.

The Acorn School menu is published for the month on the VCFC website: <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/child-family-center/child-care-center/menus.php>, and the weekly menu is posted at the child care centers in the classroom.

VCFC is thrilled to partner with Vanderbilt Campus Dining on behalf of The Acorn School's nutrition program. <https://campusdining.vanderbilt.edu/our-mission-2/sustainability/>

Food Allergies

If a child is allergic to any food (or develops an allergy after enrollment) parents are required to take the following steps:

- Inform the Site Director by email (you will be provided with any necessary forms required by DHS licensing.)
- Notify classroom teachers immediately, verbally and in writing.

Food Related Conditions

Parents must meet with their Site Director and provide supporting medical verification (a signed and dated note from your child's pediatrician) identifying the condition (e.g., food allergy, Celiac Disease, Diabetes) and listing specific foods your child is not allowed to eat. Without documentation, teachers will not withhold any item from the snack or lunch service.

Families may provide an alternative lunch for their child only if their dietary restrictions (vegetarian, vegan, dairy-free, halal, kosher) are not accommodated by the published menu. The lunch from home must be nut-free, low-sugar, no-chocolate and packed ready to eat or it will not be served. Foods will not be heated or refrigerated and must be packed appropriately, for example cold foods with an ice pack and hot foods in a thermos – children will be supported to manage lids. Food must be packed in appropriate portions in ready to eat containers and will not be diced, sliced, spooned-up or decanted by teachers.

There is no tuition adjustment for families that provide their own meals and snacks.

Sharing Food from Home

Due to complex food allergy management, parents may not bring in or order food for their child's classroom to be shared with peers. The Acorn School will not distribute food in classrooms brought in by parents, including to celebrate children's birthdays. It is possible that a classroom may engage in a cooking project. Teachers will design these learning activities to ensure that every child in the classroom can be included and notify parents in advance by posting a lesson plan. Parents may be invited to supply an ingredient.

Periodically the child care center will host a Family Potluck wherein parents provide a dish from home. Children will participate in this event only with their parent/guardian's supervision to select and enjoy foods appropriate for them. VCFC assumes no responsibility or liability for foods provided by families.

WELL CHILD

VCFC 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 The Acorn School program to attend. Parent partnership is necessary to comply with the Well Child Policies. The goal is to keep well children in school and parents at work. However, the health of all children is the priority over the inconvenience to one family asked to keep their ill child home.

Parents will report contagious illness to their Site Director as soon as possible and within the day of diagnosis so that the classroom can be informed and the illness posted in accordance with DHS licensing policy (the child's identity will be kept confidential.)

Hand Washing

Hand washing is the #1 prevention practice in place at VCFC to support health. By teaching children healthy hygiene practices, adults minimize the spread of illness.

- Parents will facilitate children's handwashing upon entering the classroom.
- Teachers will ensure every child washes their hands before and after eating and after toileting, including diaper changes.

Partnership

We ask that parents assess their child's health and wellness based on the child's behavior at home as a first indicator of ill health before arriving at the child care center. If upon arrival teachers identify that the child is not well enough to attend The Acorn School, the child will be sent home with the parent. If the child becomes ill while at school, they will be isolated from the rest of the children as able. Parents will be notified and asked to come and pick up the child as soon as possible and within one hour. Children may return to The Acorn School after they have been *symptom free* 24 hours without the aid of fever-reducing medication.

VCFC defines these policies in an effort to protect the health and safety of all children enrolled in the program. These policies align with the Metro Nashville Public Schools' policies.

Parents may not bring a child to VCFC if they exhibit any of the following symptoms and until the child symptom free for 24 hours:

Fever: A fever of 100 degrees or higher. Fevers are generally an indication that the body is attempting to fight off infection.

Nasal Discharge: A clogged or runny nose with green or yellow mucus. The only exception is if the child was seen by a pediatrician and has a pediatric release note.*

Conjunctivitis: Commonly termed Pink Eye, this condition is highly contagious. Symptoms include itchy, watery eyes or discharge. The child may not be at VCFC until symptom free or if the parent provides a pediatric release note.*

Lice: The child must be louse and nit free to be readmitted to child care. A child diagnosed with scabies or lice shall have written documentation proof of treatment signed and dated prior to readmission, per DHS licensing regulation.

Diarrhea: This is especially of concern for infants and toddlers because of the risk of dehydration. The child may not be at VCFC until symptom free. Teachers recognize the difference between loose stool related to breast feeding and teething, and diarrhea; parents cannot negotiate on this symptom.

Vomiting: This is especially of concern for infants and toddlers because of the risk of dehydration. The child may not be at VCFC until symptom free. Teachers recognize the difference between spit-up and vomiting; parents cannot negotiate on this symptom.

Unexplained Skin Conditions/Rash: Children will be excluded from The Acorn School for any patterns of small bumps, blisters and blotches (including: Chicken Pox, Fifth's Disease, Hand-Foot-Mouth Disease, Impetigo, Measles, Rubella, Scarlet Fever.) The child may not be at school until symptom free or if the parent provides a pediatric release note* meeting all the following components:

- ✓ *The note dated within 48 hours of the day provided to The Acorn School (presented on the day the parent seeks to readmit child)*
- ✓ *Stamped by a medical office*
- ✓ *Expressly stating that the child was examined by a physician*
- ✓ *Expressly stating that the child is well enough to attend licensed child care*
- ✓ *Expressly stating that the child poses no risk of contagion to the other children and adults in the child care*

The Acorn School will not administer medication to young children. This includes pain relievers for teething or muscle soreness. Parents may choose to provide their child with pain relievers by administering these at home *as long as the medication does not mask symptoms of contagious illness.*

Children are often no longer contagious and well enough to return to school before they complete a course of antibiotics. Parents are advised to ask their pediatrician for twice a day antibiotics to support the family to easily store and administer the medication at home. In the event this is not possible, parents will come on site to administer the antibiotic to their child.

The Acorn School recognizes that some children live with certain chronic conditions under consistent pediatric management (e.g., asthma, diabetes, Epi-Pen for severe allergy.) In these rare instances, The Acorn School will compassionately partner with parents to ensure needed emergency medication is on site and may be administered in a true emergency. However, parents are expected to manage routine medication administration in non-emergencies.

To administer medication:

- Parent must first communicate directly with the Site Director to request an exception, providing supporting medical documentation as requested.
- Parent will provide the *medication in its original container* with written directions on the dosage and frequency, with a signed and dated pediatric note listing the diagnosis and these precise instructions.
- Medication will not be administered to the child in any manner or for any reason except as stated on the pediatric note on file.
- Parents must update this note quarterly (or more frequently if asked).
- Parents have the sole responsibility to maintain medication and inventory it regularly to ensure it is replaced ahead of expiration. Teachers are required to discard expired medication on the date of expiration.
- Teacher will document every occurrence of medication administration, per DHS regulation.

DIAPERING AND TOILET LEARNING

Toilet learning is a developmental process in which a child learns to use the toilet appropriately. Children are ready to learn when they are healthy, well nourished, and not pressured to achieve at a level above their capability.

Parents partner with teachers, communicating frequently, so that the home-to-school approach is coordinated and consistent. By sharing terms and strategies, adults unite to support the child. As in many areas of child development, children must reach a certain age to begin (often between 24 and 30 months of age) or be in the proper setting or situation before they are ready to learn.

Parents will provide diapers or training pants. Parents have the responsibility to inventory supplies in a timely manner and replace these when stocks are low.

Parents will provide any needed creams and lotions for their child and will sign the appropriate authorization form to allow teachers to apply it. The product must be in its original container and labeled with the child's first and last name. *Teachers will not apply ointment, creams and lotions to the child unless parents have completed the appropriate DHS forms.* Parents must replace expiring products; teachers will not apply to children, and will discard, expired products.

Parents will bring the child in a clean diaper. Teachers check diapers and/or encourage children to use the toilet at least every two hour time block of waking hours. A child will be changed as soon as possible once a teacher realizes the diaper is soiled. Diaper checks and diaper changes are documented.

DENTAL HEALTH

The Acorn School incorporates a Healthy Teeth curriculum for children ages 16 months and older. Teeth-brushing is part of our daily routine, beginning first with brushstroke practice in Circle Time.

- Classrooms will only use water and will focus children on brushstroke mastery.
- Teachers will provide children with a joyful experience of their healthy teeth, tongue, gums, lips, and mouth.
- Teachers will use books and song to provide positive healthy teeth messages.
- Parents will provide their child with a new toothbrush and a toothbrush cover, labeled in permanent marker with the child's first and last name.
- Parents will replace the toothbrush monthly.

POLICIES

Attendance

The Acorn School is open twelve months a year, Monday through Friday. Current hours of 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM will change effective July 1, 2020 to 7:00 AM to 6:00 PM. Children are required to be signed in at school by 10:00 AM every day to support their social and emotional development with a consistent routine (*an exception will be made for pediatric appointments, with a note.*)

Please inform the program by 10:00 AM if your child will not be attending due to illness or unforeseen absence. Please communicate planned absences to your Site Director via email or by phone and verbally to your classroom teachers.

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

Independence Day

*Labor Day**

Thanksgiving, day after Thanksgiving

Winter Break

New Year's Day

Memorial Day

*VCFC may provide child care to university employees required to work on Labor Day 2020, if VU classes are in session. As in prior years, enrolled university families will be surveyed to assess this need.

Date	The Acorn School Calendar
June 1, 2020	Enrollment Packet for 2020-21 due to site director
July 3, 2020	Independence Day Holiday
August 6-7, 2020	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Days
August 7, 2020	Classroom Open for Teacher Meet & Greet 5:00 PM
August 10, 2020	2020-2021 School Year Begins
October 23, 2020	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Day
January 18, 2021	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Day
May 21, 2021	Acorn School Closed: Teacher In-service Day
July 5, 2021	Independence Day Holiday
August 4, 2021	Last Day of 2020-2021 School Year

There is no tuition proration for dates of closure or child absences.

Use of Space

Please make sure your child is supervised by you at all times until signed into the program and placed with the teacher in the classroom. As you enter the center, take the opportunity to encourage your child's awareness of the displays that indicate upcoming activities and that document children's learning. Please encourage walking feet. Please make sure you close doors and gates securely behind you. Please do not allow your child to open doors, climb on furniture and equipment, or touch the adult tools on the reception counter. Your partnership to establish safe and respectful boundaries for your child is so appreciated.

Access Code

Every family is provided with the access code, which is changed quarterly. Parents who cannot recall the access code must knock or ring the doorbell to gain entrance. Do not share access codes with others.

Sign In and Sign Out

In compliance with DHS licensing regulation and to ensure the safety and supervision of your child, sign your child in and out each day with your full legal signature or electronic code – parents that fail to complete this step will be called and required to return to the child care center and do so. The classroom registers are located at the desk in the lobby as you enter the center. After signing-in, take your child to the designated classroom or area. Please help your child through the morning steps (remove jacket, toileting and hand washing). Parents must connect visually and verbally with a member of the teaching staff in that classroom before leaving your child. ***Children may not be left in any space unattended at any time.***

The adult responsible for taking the child from The Acorn School must be on the child's Emergency Information and Authorization form. A government issued photo ID is required of anyone picking up the child – please have it ready to show to the staff on duty as requested. The authorized person must visually and verbally connect with the staff member on duty and sign the child out with the accurate time and date they are being picked up.

The Acorn School has the responsibility to refuse to release a child to any person (a) who appears to be incapacitated and/or under the influence of a controlled substance that may impair their judgement to safely care for a child, or (b) whose behavior may, as deemed by a reasonable person, place the child in imminent risk. In the event of such an occurrence, teachers will suggest that another authorized

individual (listed on the child's Emergency Information form) be contacted to come and pick the child up. If the authorized adult picking up does not cooperate and insists on removing their child from care, and/or if the staff member reasonably believes that refusal to release the child could place staff or other children in imminent risk, staff are directed to release the child to the guardian, but immediately call VUPD 911 (or non-emergency 322-2745) to report the potential risk and/or a possibly impaired driver.

Tuition

Tuition is payable in advance and due in full at the first of each month. *Payroll deduction is required for payment. Students that do not have payroll deductions pay by check in full on the first of the month.* Statements are not sent out each month. *There is a \$25.00 returned check fee. Parents will be notified when payments are past due. If an account is two months past due, parents will be asked to dis-enroll their child.*

Fees for Late Pick Ups

In the event parents are unable to pick up their child **and** depart on time, the child's account will be charged a late fee of \$10 for every five minutes (or portion thereof) which is due and payable within 24 hours. It is recommended that parents arrive on site no later than 5:45 PM to manage their child's transition. Please understand the impact caused by parents that are late picking up their children: this negatively affects the child's sense of security and impacts the personal and professional lives of the teachers.

Inclusion

The Acorn School seeks to create an environment in which all of our children, families, and staff can feel valued and are empowered to participate in our community and learn from one another. In compliance with federal law, Vanderbilt University does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, color, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, military service, covered veterans status, or genetic information in its administration of educational policies, programs, activities; or other University-administered programs. In addition, the University does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of their gender expression.

Special Needs

The early years are often the time when children's special needs are identified.

There are several activities embedded in The Acorn School program to support adult awareness of each child's learning strengths and needs:

- The Acorn School partners with the Peabody School of Education and Human Development in training students to assess children's (ages two years and older) speech and language at the beginning of the Fall semester.
- Parents complete the ASQ tool <https://agesandstages.com/about-asq/for-parents/> twice annually to support teachers to better understand the individual development of the child.
- Parent attendance at the Fall and Spring Parent Conferences is critical to observing, documenting, and discussing the child.

The Acorn School recognizes that appropriate supports can address a child's development and learning and will work diligently to meet the individual needs of every child, within the established framework of the licensed child care ratios, group size, and program design. In the event that a child's needs determine that an alternative learning environment would better support the family, the school will compassionately partner with the parents to ensure this successful transition.

Enrollment

All full-time, benefits-eligible Vanderbilt University employees, post-doctoral scholars, and full-time, degree-seeking students may submit an application. Applications will be accepted throughout the year. The Acorn School actively manages a Wait List to accomplish full program enrollment organized by child's date of birth and date of application. A separate Sibling Wait List is maintained; *siblings are prioritized as a space appropriate to their age becomes available*. To enroll, families will be contacted and offered placement and have two business days to secure the spot after completing the orientation and tour or the family will be placed back on the Wait List and the next family contacted. A family may choose to "pass" on offered enrollment placement without compromising their spot on the Wait List; the family that chooses to pass will be placed in an inactive status until they re-engage with VCFC in writing to be considered active.

VUMC-affiliated Families at VCFC: VCFC currently leases spaces per a service level agreement (SLA) in the VU child care centers to VUMC Child and Family Centers through June 30, 2020. Through an additional SLA, VCFC will retain VUMC-affiliated PK students (and their siblings) in limited spaces through August 4, 2021. For more information on VUMC Child and Family Centers, including Labor Day and Winter Break care, contact Kinyata McGee-Swope at kinyata.mcgee-swope@vumc.org or visit the VUMC CFC website at <https://hr.vumc.org/cfc> (VUnet ID required).

Disenrollment

Parents are required to provide a minimum 30 days written notice or the financial equivalency. Children eligible for Kindergarten (turning age five years by August 15, 2020) last day at The Acorn School will be August 5, 2020 unless earlier written notice is provided. If parents of Kindergarten-eligible children choose to stay an additional preschool year (August 10, 2020- August 4, 2021), parents need to communicate their decision to their Site Director in writing by April 1st to ensure space availability.

The Acorn School makes a strong effort to work with families in crisis, to find real and reasonable solutions that will support children and parents. It is a DHS licensing requirement to state that VCFC reserves the right to terminate enrollment *without notice* for the following reasons:

- Non-compliance with policies and procedures, including late drop-off and pick-up.
- Failure to submit required documentation, including updated immunizations (*the child will be suspended from care until documents are received.*)
- Failure to cooperate with the Well Child policy.
- Adults choosing to exhibit behavior that threatens the physical or emotional safety of the children and teachers on site.

Families in Crisis

VCFC's early childhood care and education program has the expressed objective to support children's healthy growth and development. We recognize that many families are in transition and may experience issues that impact temporary or permanent child guardianship. Vanderbilt employees are encouraged to get support for their work life balance from an appropriate resource, including the Employee Assistance Program (EAP): <https://www.vumc.org/health-wellness/worklife-connections-employee-assistance-program>

Parents experiencing family transitions (e.g., adult illness including drug rehabilitation, child custody, marital separation or divorce) may make an appointment to meet privately with their Site Director and/or the VCFC Executive Director to discuss any matters of importance in relation to issues affecting the

well-being of the child as it pertains to their enrollment in the licensed child care program. Site Directors will confidentially manage this information, sharing with teachers only necessary information regarding these changes in the home to support teachers to understand how to best care for the child, especially as these may result in children's behavior changes in the classroom.

Parent/Guardian Custody Management

It is imperative that The Acorn School staff maintain good relationships with all the significant adults in each child's life. In order to provide the best possible care for your child, VCFC asks that parent/guardians strive to implement civil and respectful communication in their partnership with one another.

Parents/Guardians will initiate communication with one another to ensure compliance and understanding with the VCFC policies and procedures, and including by sharing calendar, conference dates, forms, and paperwork. This includes strategies for sharing newsletters, Tadpoles updates, surveys, and other information. Site Directors and teachers will not be utilized as go-betweens. To minimize uncomfortable situations, disputes and problems, VCFC will not tolerate a parent/guardian speaking negatively about the other parent/guardian in front of any child or teachers. Adult confrontation with another on site is unacceptable, will not be tolerated, and subjects the family to immediate disenrollment.

Legal Documentation

VCFC complies with the documentation requirements of the TN Department of Human Services for licensed child care center regulations. Parents/Guardians must provide written clarity regarding any change in custody arrangements, and specifically list on the enrollment form which adult to contact first and listing only persons authorized to pick up the child. VCFC will share this data with VUPD as appropriate and necessary to support program compliance and to ensure the safety and well-being of all the children, parents, and staff on site.

VCFC will comply with any precise and specific directives of a court order to deny an identified parent/guardian access to the child during program hours or when releasing the child at pick-up time, but this paperwork must be provided in advance of the date of implementation for The Acorn School to honor and implement it.

CHILD ABUSE

Maltreatment of a child is prohibited by Vanderbilt policy and the law. Staff are held to a high standard to assure children under their care are safe, and are required to report concerns of maltreatment by others. Training is provided to all VCFC staff on identifying and reporting child abuse. Vanderbilt University personnel (including VCFC staff) adhere to Tennessee state law on mandatory child abuse reporting.

BABYSITTING

VCFC discourages employees from working privately for The Acorn School families and assumes no responsibility or liability for employees after their scheduled work hours.

PARENT-STAFF COMMUNICATION

Parent-Staff communication is essential to effective partnership. Communication provided by teachers may include: bulletin boards and documentation panels, Daily Notes (electronic or written), and newsletters. The teacher's primary responsibility is to supervise and support the children in the classroom; long conversations cannot be accommodated at drop-off and pick-up times and require a scheduled phone call. Parents are required to attend two Parent-Teacher Conferences each year. Additional conferences may be requested throughout the year.

TEACHER APPRECIATION

Parents coordinate teacher appreciation activities as a learning community. These delightful events happen throughout the year, with particular festivities in December for holidays and May for Teacher Appreciation Day.

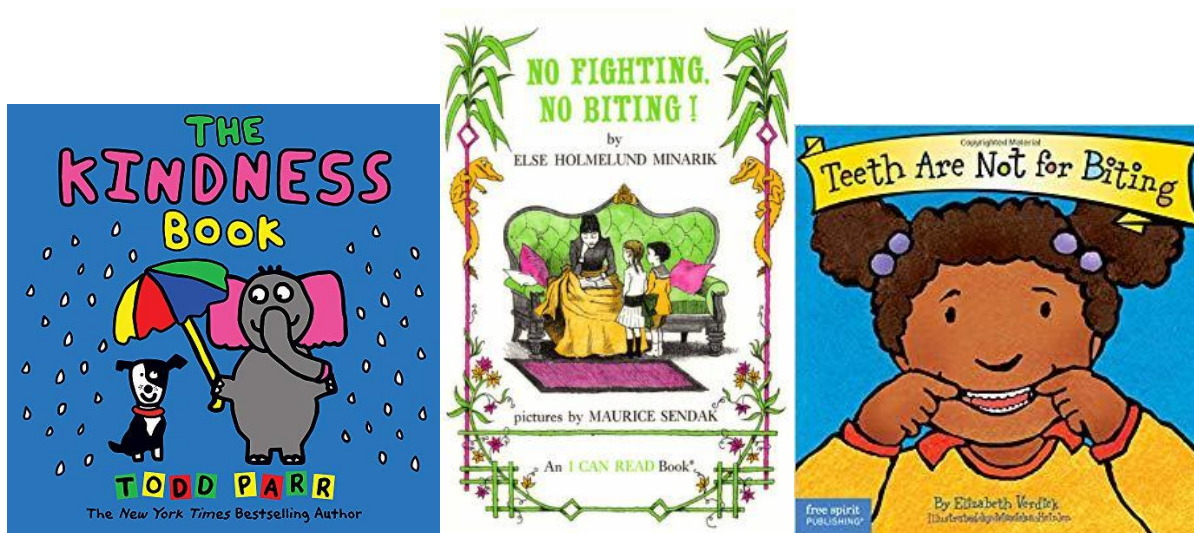
There is an active parent group called CONNECT that meets quarterly to support planning and coordination of teacher appreciation activities and parent engagement across all three child care centers. If you are inspired to volunteer, please connect with your Site Director to make your introduction to CONNECT.

BIRTHDAYS

Please discuss your child's birthday celebration in the classroom with the teachers in advance of the day of the event to create a special activity in honor of the child (favorite story, music or craft.) Many of our children have varying nutritional needs and therefore snacks including sweet treats are not allowed.

SUSPENSION AND EXPULSION

The Acorn School understands that children, especially pre-verbal children, use physical expression to share their feelings and needs. An undesirable behavior indicates an opportunity for the child to develop an important skill; it is not a “morals” issue. Early childhood educators design the learning environment to support children with opportunities to grow these skills, intentionally addressing predictable early childhood “undesirable behaviors” through developmentally appropriate activities, class discussion, and individual coaching. Some of the learning materials in the classroom may include:



Discipline is an ongoing process embedded in the child’s experience and relationships. It is possible that some children may exhibit consistent behaviors that are detrimental to the ongoing safety and security of the other children in the classroom. This may include aggression toward peers, such as biting, hitting, and kicking. The Acorn School will handle these situations discreetly with compassion and in partnership with the family.

The Tennessee Department of Human Services requires licensed child care centers to develop a written plan to address *suspension* and *expulsion*. In the event that a child’s ongoing behavior at school poses a risk to themselves or to the other children in the program, the following steps will be taken:

- The Site Director will meet in person with the parents within 48 hours of the school’s documented concerns being communicated to them.

- A written behavior plan signed by the parents and the Site Director will be put into place the day of the meeting. This must include:
 - *Identify the specific behavior being addressed (e.g., biting peers)*
 - *Identify supports in place (e.g., redirecting the child to a specific peer cohort, shadowing, providing a squeeze toy to bite)*
 - *Identify needed supports (e.g., a pediatric developmental evaluation)*
 - *Identify a precise timeline for the behavior plan (e.g., two weeks)*
 - *Identify precise metrics of behavior improvement (e.g., “The child’s attempts to bite are reduced to two incidents or less per week.”)*
 - *Identify peer respite strategy (e.g., “If the child bites, the parent will take him home for the rest of the day.”)*

- The parents will meet with the Site Director to assess the efficacy of the written behavior plan, validate progress, and modify strategies.

In the unlikely event that the child does not respond to the efforts of teachers and parents to correct the undesirable behavior, The Acorn School will provide the family with *30 days’ notice* to determine a more appropriate school placement.

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Behavioral Health Services	(615) 340-2172
Department of Human Services	(615) 313-4700
Department of Children’s Services	(615) 741-9701
Head Start	(615) 862-8860
Metro Public Health Department	(615) 340-5616
Tennessee Early Intervention Services	(800) 852-7157

For children ages 2.5 years and under
Tennessee Early Intervention Services
Phone: (615) 532-7237

For children ages 2.5 years and over
MNPS (or your school district)
(615) 259-INFO

VCFC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Executive Director is responsible for all VCFC operations and establishes The Acorn School policies and procedures reflecting research-based ECE best practice and DHS licensing regulation, and conducts activities for ongoing program quality assessment, evaluation, and improvement. This position reports directly to the Associate Vice Chancellor for Human Capital and Business Services.

The Administrative Officer is responsible for VCFC administrative operations, including The Acorn School enrollment and tuition, Wait List management, HR and Procurement functions. This position reports to the Executive Director.

The Family Services Coordinator designs and facilitates activities, programs, and events that support Vanderbilt employees across the spectrum of life, including elder care support, lactation room inventory, and new parent support. This position reports to the Executive Director.

The Education Director provides pedagogical articulation for The Acorn School across all three child care centers, working in close collaboration with teachers to facilitate dynamic Arts and Nature Education, strengthening the practice of documentation to support, expand and deepen the thoughts and ideas of children, and makes children's learning visible to parents and the community through various strategies including social media. This position reports to the Executive Director.

The Site Director provides the child care center with leadership that reflects The Acorn School's mission and philosophy, that is necessary to effective site operation, including staff management and DHS regulatory compliance, and that provides parents with the ongoing communication that supports a successful partnership. This position reports to the Executive Director.

The Administrative Assistant partners with site administration to ensure policies and procedures are well implemented, provides the support necessary to ensure systems, materials, and supplies are in place to enable the child care center's function and operation, and serves the child care center with customer engagement by welcoming families and managing enrollment forms and maintaining children's files. This position reports to the Site Director.

The Lead Teacher provides care and education to the children, designs and implements classroom activities that reflect the values and goals of The Acorn School, documents children's learning, and provides parents with ongoing communication, including two parent-teacher conferences annually, to support a successful partnership.

The Associate Teacher provides care and nurture to the children, working collegially with the Lead Teacher to implement classroom activities and achieve program goals, and supports parents with quick verbal updates during end of day transition.

The Floating Teacher provides care and nurture to the children in this flexible role designed to support teacher absences from the classroom and playground.

STUDENT WORKERS

Vanderbilt students that are employed at VCFC are a wonderful resource and add value to the VCFC community. Students must meet DHS and Vanderbilt University requirements prior to engaging with children through The Acorn School, but are not VCFC staff, and parents may not leave their child alone with them in The Acorn School program.

YOUTH INTERNS

Career Technical Education and youth job training is an important component of VCFC's relationship to the Nashville community. These partnerships are a wonderful way to connect the work of The Acorn School early childhood educators to employment development opportunities.

VCFC may provide opportunities for site visits and observations at The Acorn School, and training that would engage youth to consider employment opportunities in the field of Child Development.

AGREEMENTS

I have read The Acorn School Family Handbook and agree to comply with the policies and procedures contained therein.

(Please initial)

___ I have thoroughly read The Acorn School Family Handbook, available on the VCFC website.

___ I read and understand and agree to comply with the policies and procedures which inform the services providing licensed child care.

___ I understand that The Acorn School provides access to the child care center classrooms to the Peabody College of Education and Human Development for observation, training and research opportunities.

___ I understand and agree that neither Vanderbilt Child and Family Center, Vanderbilt University, nor any of their officers, agents, or employees are liable for bodily injuries or illnesses suffered by my child(ren) or damages to personal belongings, unless the injury, illness, or property damage was the direct result of willful negligence on the part of those operating VCFC's The Acorn School.

___ I understand and agree to provide The Acorn School with 30 days written notice of my child's disenrollment or the financial equivalency. Children age-eligible for Kindergarten will be automatically dis-enrolled by August 5, 2020 or August 4, 2021 (unless parents provide written notice by the prior April 1st of their intention to stay another preschool year).

___ I understand that my child's image will be used in photographs within The Acorn School classroom's documentation of learning (e.g., anecdotal notes, bulletin boards, newsletters).

___ I understand that VCFC has the right and the responsibility to modify practice to conform with changes to Tennessee Department of Human Services licensing regulation.

___ I understand that VCFC reserves the right to update this handbook at any time, to ensure compliance with DHS and Vanderbilt policies and practices.

(Optional)

___ I give permission for my child's image to be shared on The Acorn School classroom electronic updates (including Tadpoles) and on the electronic bulletin board in the center lobby.

___ I give permission for my child's image to be used on VU social media, websites and publications.

Parent Signature

____/____/_____
Date

A copy of this form will be maintained in your child's file



Voluntary Participation for The Acorn School

I am requesting that my family be included in my child's classroom roster. I understand that my decision to participate is purely voluntary. I will leave the Family Information form (below) blank if I choose to opt out.

I understand the classroom roster will be printed and published and released to the other families in my child's classroom and provided to the Parent CONNECT group. The intent of the roster is to support community through the development of peer relationships by identifying one way for children and their families to engage for playdates and recreation.

Access to this information may not be used for marketing, research, or other business purposes.

_____ / /
Parent Signature Date

Please provide *only* the information that you want to be included in the July 2020-August 2021 School Year classroom roster. You may choose to leave lines blank. Print clearly.

Child's First Name _____ Last Name _____

Nickname _____ DOB / /

Parent's First Name _____ Last Name _____

Email: _____ Phone - -

Parent's First Name _____ Last Name _____

Email: _____ Phone - -

Cool stuff about us: _____
