



## **2022-2023 Family Handbook**

411 S. Burrowes Street  
State College, PA 16801  
814-237-1785

E-mail: [occmontessori@gmail.com](mailto:occmontessori@gmail.com)  
[www.occmontessori.org](http://www.occmontessori.org)

The mission of Our Children's Center is to educate children in a dynamic, warm, engaging, responsive, multi-cultural environment designed both to stimulate and to nurture them; to support and fairly compensate a highly-skilled professional staff; to promote and maintain a diverse student and staff population; and to foster a strong sense of community among families.

Dear Families,

Welcome to Our Children's Center Montessori School. Your child, and indeed, your entire family are part of a special early childhood education program: a school committed to the positive development of children, parents, and staff. Our Children's Center is a community-centered school whose mission is to offer the highest quality Montessori education for all children.

At OCC, we aim to enroll not only a child but the family. We hope that you will take advantage of the school's social and community-building events. Parental participation is a vital component of our program. We firmly believe that we can not educate your child without you. Through Board participation, volunteering (either in the classroom or out), or attending school functions, your involvement enriches our school community, and we hope the experience of being part of OCC will enrich your life, as well.

This Family Handbook contains important information regarding OCC's policies and procedures. Each family receives a website link to access/download the handbook upon entry to the program and should review it at least annually throughout their family's enrollment. Should alterations to the content be required, parents will be notified.

Please review your Family Handbook carefully, and sign and return the Acknowledgement of Receipt prior to the start of the school year in August. As always, please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Your children are our source of inspiration, awe, and wonder. Let us begin the year together with excitement and anticipation.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Carswell  
Head of School

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## **An Introduction**

Our Children's Center (OCC) is a private, non-profit Montessori preschool and kindergarten. We welcome families from diverse religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Located in downtown State College, OCC offers a variety of educational programs with flexible options for children ages 12 months to 6 years.

Montessori education uses a "whole child" approach with activities designed to promote social skills, emotional and cognitive growth, and physical coordination. Teachers prepare the classroom environment so that the activities presented are attractive to children, developmentally appropriate, multi-sensorial, and self-correcting.

Most of the learning is self-directed. Respect for self, others, and the environment is a core Montessori principle. The goal of the Montessori educational philosophy is to develop autonomous, competent, empathetic, responsible problem-solvers who will make a positive impact on the world.

Our Board of Directors oversees the school's budget and ensures that the school's goals and programs are aligned with our mission. The OCC Board of Directors employs a Head of School to organize and supervise the school's programs.

Rebekah Carswell is the school's Head of School, charged with ensuring the smooth day-to-day functioning of the school, meeting the licensing regulations for both the PA Department of Human Services and the PA Department of Education, curriculum and staff development, grant writing and creating systems for continuous quality improvement for our program. Pattie Wingreen serves as the Office Manager and is responsible for student registration and records, accounting, and assisting with daily operations.

*"If we could say, 'We are respectful and courteous in our dealing with children--we treat them as we would like to be treated ourselves,' we should have mastered a great educational principle and be setting an example of a good education." ~ Maria Montessori*

## General Information

<b>Hours</b>	OCC opens for our Before School Program at 7:45 am and closes the After School Program at 5:15 pm, Monday through Friday.
<b>Phone &amp; Email</b>	814-237-1585 <a href="mailto:occmontessori@gmail.com">occmontessori@gmail.com</a> - Main Office <a href="mailto:occofficepattie@gmail.com">occofficepattie@gmail.com</a> - Finance (Ms. Pattie) <a href="mailto:occheadofschool@gmail.com">occheadofschool@gmail.com</a> - Head of School (Ms. Rebekah)
<b>Contacting Us</b>	The OCC office is typically staffed between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm. Please note, however, that our jobs take us to all parts of the building. Should you need to reach us, please feel free to email or leave a voicemail message; messages are checked frequently.
<b>Non-discrimination Policy</b>	<p>Admissions, the provisions of services, and referrals of clients shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression. Program services shall be made accessible to eligible persons with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to, equipment redesign, the provision of aides, and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods. Any individual/client/student (and/or their guardian), who believes they have been discriminated against, may file a complaint of discrimination with the following:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Department of Public Welfare; Bureau of Equal Opportunity  Room 223, Health and Welfare Building  PO Box 2675  Harrisburg, PA 17105</p>

## **Our Children's Center Mission**

Our school's vision is to educate children in an engaging and responsive environment designed to both stimulate and nurture them; foster a strong sense of community among our families; to support a highly skilled professional staff; and to promote, encourage and facilitate a philanthropic attitude toward, and engagement with, the surrounding community in order to ensure that the school's children, families, staff, and community together develop a sense of respect for themselves and for others.

### **To support this mission, Our Children's Center will:**

- Support Montessori teachers by providing appropriate materials and facilities in the service of creating a thoughtfully prepared environment for the children;
- Encourage an interconnected network of learning opportunities among students, staff, and parents by offering parenting workshops, avenues for professional development, and ways for community members to share their expertise with our students;
- Develop and maintain a climate of grace and courtesy, kinship, and respect among students and the adults who educate them;
- Facilitate relationships among families through regular written and oral communication between school and home, service projects, volunteer and leadership opportunities, support and interest groups and social events;
- Showcase the strengths of the Montessori philosophy of early childhood education by exemplifying the tenets of the philosophy in practice;
- Fund scholarships that create educational opportunities for Montessori-minded families with financial need.

# The Montessori Philosophy

Respect is at the core of the Montessori philosophy-- respect for oneself, for others, for life, and for the environment. Ground rules and behavioral expectations for both children and adults in Montessori settings are based upon these tenets.

Specific educational practices common to most Montessori programs include multi-age groupings, beautiful and carefully designed learning environments, emphasis on teacher observation and research, a focus on the development of the “whole child”, children’s selection of materials from within an appropriate range, and clear social and behavioral expectations.

In all aspects of learning, children move at their own pace, repeating activities until a sense of inner mastery moves them on to the next level of difficulty. A rich array of hands-on materials is offered, engaging the child in learning on many levels.

- Practical Life activities-- e.g., hand washing, sweeping, and sewing-- develop children’s hand-eye coordination, sense of sequence, and ability to remain with the entire cycle of an activity. Practical Life materials enable children to learn how to care for themselves and the environment.
- The Sensorial materials-- a rich array of grading, sorting, and sensory discrimination activities develop children’s perceptual abilities and refine their observation skills.
- Literacy and mathematical activities- these two other well-developed curriculum areas permeate all aspects of classroom life. Science and cultural experiences enable the child to view the world’s similarities and differences and to relish life on this planet.
- Music and movement offer the child vehicles for personal expression and joy. Throughout the school year, curriculum materials are continually revised and expanded in response to the children’s changing needs and interests.
- Open-ended materials-- blocks, sand, dramatic play and art media-- encourage exploration and self-expression while allowing each child to impose his or her organizational style upon the process.

In order to design and facilitate learning in these highly-individualized environments, Montessori teachers must be well prepared. They need a complete understanding of child development and the Montessori curriculum, as well as excellent observation and communication skills. Ongoing professional development is required of all staff and tailored to individual needs and interests.

## **OCC Expectations**

School-wide expectations help children become independent in the environment and aid in the development of the school as a peaceful community.

We list the following general OCC Expectations below to enhance parental awareness. Please reinforce these rules when in your child's company at school. Additionally, be aware that many of the ground rules apply to everyone, including adults.

### **The following are the general ground rules at Our Children's Center:**

- Use quiet walking feet.
- While walking in the hallways, stay near an adult.
- Enter only classroom spaces in which you are invited.
- Use an inside, gentle voice inside the school.
- Touch another child's work only when invited.
- Work together with another child only when invited.
- Keep your hands to your own body.
- Play with different friends each day-share your friendship.
- Wash hands upon entering the classroom, before and after eating, and after using the restroom.
- Put your materials away when finished so they are ready for the next person.
- Interrupt politely (when necessary) by gently placing a hand on a teacher's shoulder or arm and waiting for eye contact.
- Take care of each other, the materials, the environment, and our world.

### **No Toys Please**

We ask that children not bring toys or other items from home into school as they often become a source of confusion and heartache in the classroom. Please explain to your child that some things are for school and some things are just for home. Items found in nature, however, are always welcome.

# **Arrival and Dismissal Procedures**

## **Attendance and Sign-In**

Every child must pass a health screening and temperature check before arriving at school. Parents **MUST** complete this sign in process before your child is permitted to enter the building. Health screenings keep our school community safe and daily sign-in is required by PA state law.

Please call or email the office by 8:30 am if your child will be absent. Give the reason for the absence so that we may record it in our illness tracking log. Additional information regarding illness policy and procedures can be found on page 14.

It is important that children regularly attend school. If your child will be absent for long periods of time, please notify the office. If you know in advance that your child will not be at school on a particular day (including vacations), please let us know, via email to the office, in advance.

## **Drop-off and Pick-up Locations**

We offer two options for arrival and dismissal. The Car Line is located at the rear alley entrance. Walking/biking families and those who choose to park and walk children to the door can use the front Burrowes Courtyard doorway. If you need a longer goodbye, please park your car and walk your child to our front entrance. We need to keep the car line moving smoothly during arrival and dismissal.

## **Car Line Procedures**

- Drive on Burrowes St, turn left at Robin Alley, and left again onto F Alley so that your car is facing Nittany Ave.
- Install your child's carseat behind the driver's seat so that they can easily exit/enter the vehicle away from traffic. Children should have their belongings packed and ready near the carseat for a staff member to unload.
- For arrival, pull up to the entrance/stairs. A staff member will help your child out of the vehicle with their belongings and bring them into the school.
- For dismissal, pull forward as far as you are able in the alley up to the edge of Nittany Ave. You will be responsible for loading your child into the car and buckling them into their carseat.
- Enter and exit the vehicle in a timely manner so that the line continues to move forward.

## **Front Door Procedures**

- If using the front entrance, please walk your child down into the courtyard and to the door. Please also walk down into the courtyard to pick them up.
- Street parking is available along both sides of Burrowes Street. We recommend utilizing both the 300 and 400 blocks.
- A bike rack is available at the front of our building for bikes, trailers, strollers, scooters, etc to park. You are welcome to leave items at the rack throughout the day.

## **Classroom Arrivals**

It is important that your child arrive on time for their session - we are a school and not simply a childcare center. Young children are comforted by regular routines. The familiarity of predictable rhythm and routines helps them feel secure in the environment. Please keep in mind that arrival time is our first chance in the day to make contact with each child.

We regard this initial greeting and orientation time as highly important; it can set the tone for the rest of the day. Consistently arriving late, when all the children are already busy working, can be anxiety-producing for some children. It also forces teachers to stop lessons and move away from the majority of children in order to transition the late child into the room. We expect children at school within 15 minutes of arrival time (by 9:00 am). After 9:00 am, the Car Line closes and you will need to park and walk your child to the front entrance.

## **Why say goodbye at the door?**

Saying “goodbye” to your child at the door is sometimes difficult for your child and for you. You may be tempted to follow your child into the classroom to say goodbye; this practice, however, may make your child feel less secure and lengthen the time it takes him or her to settle into the classroom.

We encourage you to say a brief farewell at the school entrance, modeling a cheerful attitude so that your child does not sense any ambivalence on your part. Sometimes, a child creates a small goodbye ritual, doing everything in the same order before entering school. Keeping your goodbye ritual outside the classroom helps your child move into the classroom space and separate from you more easily.

## **Classroom Dismissals**

It is important that your child be picked up on time. It can be a frightening experience for a small child to be left at the school after the routine departure time. Late pick-ups also interrupt the schedules-we need prompt pickups for staff dismissals and ratios.

If an unexpected situation arises such that you cannot pick up your child on-time, please notify us so we can explain to your child why you are late. Late fees will be noted to your family’s account. Late pick-up fees are \$10 and then an additional \$5 per 5 minutes. Late pick-up fees after 5:15 pm are \$10 and an additional \$10 per 5 minutes.

## **Transitions as a Time of Connection**

Transitions can sometimes be difficult for young children, but they are also an opportunity for meaningful connection with your child. We believe that giving your child your full attention for those few minutes at arrival and dismissal is very important. No matter how the start of the day unfolded, slowing down for a minute in the morning when you reach the school entrance can calm everyone and allow for a more peaceful goodbye. Be ready without distraction when you greet your child at the end of their school session. Put away your phones, and be present with your child!

## General Daily Routines

### Toddler

7:45 am - 8:45 am	Before School
8:45 am - 9:00 am	Morning Arrival
8:45 am - 10:00 am	First Work Cycle
10:00 am - 10:45 am	Outdoor Play
11:00 am - 11:45 am	Second Work Cycle
12:00 pm	Half Day Dismissal
11:45 am -12:30 pm	Lunch, Begin Nap
12:30 pm - 3:00 pm	Nap
3:15 pm	School Day Dismissal
3:15 pm -5:15 pm	After School

### Primary

7:45 am - 8:45 am	Before School
8:45 am - 9:00 am	Morning Arrival
8:45 am -11:15 am	Morning Work Cycle
11:15 am - 12:00 pm	Outdoor Play
12:00 pm	Half Day Dismissal
12:15 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch, Begin Rest
12:45 pm - 1:30 pm	Rest/Quiet Time
1:30 pm - 3:00 pm	Afternoon Session/Nap
3:15 pm	School Day Dismissal
3:15 pm - 5:15 pm	After School

### Before School Care

Our Before School Program is held in the Big Room. Children might choose to help teachers with tasks to prepare for the day, or play with open-ended activities such as blocks, marble runs, and legos.

If your child is in Before School, you will need to ring the front or back doorbells for drop-off. We don't always have a staff member in the lobby before 8:45 am.

### After School Care

Our After School Program is held in the Big Room. Snacks are offered to all children after the school day dismissal. During After School, our focus is on FUN! We have open-ended items to encourage creative play, gross motor activities, and games. Students also regularly enjoy special projects and crafts. We will attempt to play outside as often as possible.

If your child is in After School, you can call the school when you are on your way with an ETA and we will try to have your child ready when you arrive. Otherwise, please call or ring the doorbell when you arrive and we will bring your child out once they have cleaned up and gathered their things.

# Supplies for School

## Inside Appropriate Shoes

All children should have a pair of “indoor shoes” to wear within the classrooms. These shoes should be easily put on and off by the child independently. No slippers please. Please plan for these shoes to remain at OCC.

## Outside Appropriate Shoes

Children should wear weather appropriate shoes to school each day. All footwear should be comfortable and sturdy. For your child’s safety, we strongly recommend sneakers as the safest footwear for active play. Children trip easily in sandals and dress shoes, and boots are slippery on the linoleum floors. Ideally, shoe choices should be ones that your child is able to put on and off themselves with minimal adult assistance. We discourage flip-flops, or other types of loose-fitting footwear for outdoor wear at school.

## Backpack

Every child should have a backpack that is large enough to hold their water bottle, lunchbag, and any other items traveling to and from school each day.

## Clothing Choices

Children are working on independence with toileting and clothing changes. Soft, loose fitting cotton shorts, pants, and shirts are comfortable and easiest for children to manage on their own. Tight jeans or leggings, clothing with buttons or snaps, etc all can be difficult to manipulate.

During the day, your child may work with water, mud, glue, paint, or other “messy” items. School clothes should be “work clothes” and ones that you and/or your child are comfortable with staining or sending home to wash.

## Spare Clothing

At minimum, two full sets of clothing (socks, underwear, shirt, pants) should be kept at school. Please check regularly to ensure that your child’s spare clothing is season appropriate and the correct size. If your child is working on, or new, to toilet learning it is helpful to have multiple pairs of socks, underwear, and pants on hand. Please replace as needed. Please label all items.

## Winter/Rain Gear

We go outside daily, even if the ground is wet/muddy or it is drizzling. You are welcome to keep rain gear at school, or send it in wet weather. Please label all items.

When the weather turns cold, please send your child to school with the following labeled items: winter coat, hat, gloves or mittens, sturdy walking shoes or warm snow boots, (not rain boots) and try to have them wear warm pants. If your child does not want to wear pants, please send in a pair of sweatpants to wear over tights, leggings, or lightweight pants. Planning for and allowing children to keep a pair of snow pants at school is a great way to know that they are always prepared. Please be sure that all winter gear is labeled.

# **Food at OCC**

## **OCC is a NUT-FREE school.**

An understanding of peanut/tree-nut allergies is essential to the health and safety of the children attending OCC. In some cases, allergies are so severe that a child can even react to airborne allergens, as well as when they come into contact with skin. Please do not bring lunches or snacks that contain peanuts or tree-nuts (cashews, almonds, walnuts, etc.). As a safety precaution, when your children enter the classroom each morning, they will be asked to wash hands and faces at the sink.

## **Snack Time**

Nutrition is an integral part of the daily program at OCC. Our goals include increasing children's acceptance of a wide variety of foods and promoting good eating habits for optimal physical and mental development. Snack time provides an excellent opportunity for working toward these goals. Typically, each classroom is served one carbohydrate and either a fruit, vegetable or dairy product. In our classrooms, snacks are set out near a table, designed as the snack table in the classroom. Children monitor their own hunger level to determine when they will have a snack. In keeping with promoting healthy habits, water is available to drink with snacks.

## **Lunch Time**

If your child brings lunch to school, please pack a nutritious lunch of foods they enjoy. A placemat (use a cloth napkin), silverware, and cooler pack should also be included. Children should have containers that they are able to open and close independently or with minimal teacher support.

Please send reasonable child-sized portions. Although microwaves are available for heating up leftovers, it's preferred (and your child can start eating immediately!) if you simply pack foods that they will eat at room temperature. Please limit the number of items to 3-5 different foods. Sometimes too many choices cause confusion and children actually eat less food.

## **Zero Waste**

OCC is aiming to become a Zero-Waste facility. In doing so, we ask that all children pack lunches in a fashion that is "Earth-friendly." Please avoid individually wrapped, pre-packaged goods (granola bars, chips, cookies, yogurt or applesauce tubes/pouches, etc.). Any trash will be sent home in lunchboxes. We also ask that children bring reusable drink containers. We appreciate your cooperation as we encourage our children to understand and appreciate the importance of striving toward a zero-waste lifestyle.

## **Catered Lunches**

OCC offers catered lunches. Each lunch includes an entrée (spaghetti, pizza, soup, sandwich, etc.), vegetables, and fruit. Lunch must be purchased monthly, and there is no adjustment for absences or school closures. Menus are available on our website and emailed the week prior to the new month. Children who do not participate in catered lunch may enjoy Pizza Thursday (also purchased monthly). All lunch charges will be added to monthly invoices.

## **OCC Play and Excursions**

Spending time outside and in open-ended play is an important part of our school day. Lots of learning happens outdoors, and our classrooms move outside daily unless the weather is inclement. During the winter, we take all of the children outside on days when the temperature is above 25 F (this includes the wind chill factor and/or real-feel temperature). OCC uses the AccuWeather website in order to make the decision about going outside to play or if we will stay indoors. Please send your children to school prepared for the weather. Temperature appropriate clothing, rain gear, or winter gear will help ensure that we can take full advantage of our playscape and the community surrounding our OCC school building.

### **Outdoor Play**

Our playscape is beautiful, functional, and fun. We have stones, large and small wooden blocks, sand, dirt, water, and many accessories to support creative and dramatic play. There are planters for the children to maintain, growing flowers and vegetables enjoyed by the school.

### **Indoor Play**

The All-purpose room, known as the Big Room, is also utilized as an indoor play area with gross-motor activities supervised by teachers. We have climbers, scooters, stationary “exercise” equipment, building sets, and many other fun activities for the children.

### **Walks**

Our Primary students frequently enjoy walks around the neighborhood. Toddlers will sometimes take short walks, utilizing strollers as needed for the youngest students. Occasionally, we venture as far as the Nittany Lion Shrine or the Alumni Gardens Duck Pond. We enjoy our neighborhood and the wonderful attributes of being located in the State College Borough. All families are asked to sign a walking field trip consent at enrollment.

### **Field Trips**

As part of our educational program, we occasionally take groups of children on excursions into the community. The opportunity to go on field trips depends upon each child’s age, level of maturity, and interests. We view the three-year cycle as a continuum & plan field trips accordingly.

Younger children need to focus on “the basics” of familiarity with routines, materials, teachers, and expectations; hence, they may go on only one field trip, perhaps to a park. Older, more mature children usually have these basics under their belts and are ready and eager for more frequent and diverse community experiences. All families are notified of pending excursions and permission is requested prior to the event.

### **Walking Field Trips**

Several of our destinations are within walking distance of OCC. Even so, if we are to enter a facility, we are required to again get your signed permission for your child to join us. Examples of “Walking Field Trips” would be a trip to Schlow Library or Alpha Fire Company.

# Illness Policies and Procedures

## Covid-19 Safety Plan

All standard OCC illness policies and procedures are currently superseded by our Covid-19 Safety Plan, found at [www.occmontessori.org](http://www.occmontessori.org) on the Current Families tab. The information remains below for your reference and to gain an understanding of our overall expectations surrounding illness and safe return to school.

## Illness-Onset at Home

Your child's health is very important to us. Please call or email the office by 8:30 am to let us know when your child is going to be absent due to illness. Please keep your child at home until he or she is symptom-free, without medication, for at least 24 hours.

This 24-hour period ensures that your child is fully recovered and not contagious before returning to school. A good rule of thumb is that if your child is not well enough to participate fully in the day's activities (and this includes outside play), he/she should stay at home.

When you call the school to inform us of an absence, or when you receive a diagnosis for your child, please let us know. You can email or leave a voicemail message about your child's symptoms and/or illness. We are required to track illnesses in a log at school.

## Illness-Onset at School

If your child becomes ill at OCC, we will call you to arrange for immediate pick-up. If we cannot reach you, we will call the individuals listed on your emergency card. We will keep your child in the office under staff supervision, until you arrive.

We will call you if your child has one or more of these symptoms:

- A temperature of 100.4 degrees or more
- A temperature below 100.4 with behavior changes
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- An unexplained rash
- Symptoms of a communicable disease
- Unusual or persistent drowsiness
- Unusual and persistent behavior change
- Wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Evidence of head lice or discovery of a deer-tick bite

## Illness-Online Resources

Some helpful online sources that lists common childhood illnesses and their symptoms are:

[www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org), [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com), [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

# **Parent/School Communication**

## **Communication from School to Home**

OCC uses Transparent Classroom for daily communication with parents, sharing photos, and tracking each child's daily work and activities. To help you stay informed with the happenings at OCC, all parents can expect weekly classroom reflections, and periodic school-wide emails/Transparent Classroom messages. The OCC website ([www.occmontessori.org](http://www.occmontessori.org)) has additional information such as the school calendar, lunch menus, forms, and other great information for both new and current families.

OCC uses a notification system, One Call Now, for urgent messages sent to both phones (via text and/or voice) and email. Weather closures, early dismissals, or other important reminders will often be sent via One Call.

## **Keeping the Lines of Communication Open**

The importance of communication and understanding between teachers and parents cannot be overemphasized. Each adult sees the child in a different setting and all different times of the day, consequently seeing different facets of his/her personality. Knowing about changes (e.g. moving, new baby, grandparents visiting) can greatly help us in understanding changes in the child's behavior and attitudes in school.

While we are strongly of the mindset that the staff should be open and available for parent-teacher communications, sometimes such conversations during the school day can be difficult. If you would like additional feedback on how your child is doing, or simply have questions, feel free to send a note to teachers via Transparent Classroom or send an email to the classroom. Your child's teacher will respond as quickly as possible. If needed, you may speak with the Head of School in person or via email.

## **Conferences**

Parent-teacher conferences are available for all parents several times each year, with additional conferences when needed. Please see the current school calendar for scheduled conference days. Sign-ups will be available as each conference time nears. If you have concerns that you would like to share about your child before your conference time, please contact the Head of School.

## **Progress Reports**

Written progress reports for each child are sent home three times during the school year. These offer an additional source of detailed information regarding your child's experience in the classroom, academic progress and overall development. We will utilize classroom observations, the Ages and Stages Developmental Screening Tool, as well as Student portfolios to provide parents with a comprehensive view of their child's progress and development.

# **The Growing and Developing Child**

## **Social Services Referrals**

When a child demonstrates speech, learning, or behavioral difficulties, it is up to the classroom teacher to closely observe and document the child's behavior. In order to support the child, the teacher will attempt to adapt the activities and environment to meet the child's needs. Parents will be notified of concerns and, working together with the school's administration, a plan will be created to address concerns.

Following the initial adaptations and modifications, parents may be referred to additional family and community outreach to support the child's needs. Resources will be made available to the family. The OCC staff will encourage and assist with any and all support within our capacity.

## **Self-Direction**

At OCC, we encourage and expect children to become self-sufficient in many ways. From remembering to put away a work before getting out another work, to helping clean up a spill, to learning ways to tell another child that he or she wishes to work alone, every day provides countless opportunities for your child to gain independence at an appropriate level. Children change their own shoes, coats, and clothing, serve themselves food, eat independently, and clean up. You may be surprised at the many activities your child will start to do at home after attending OCC for a time.

## **Toilet Learning**

In toileting, as in all aspects of daily living, we encourage a child's natural progression toward independence. Independence occurs in stages if the child receives appropriate support and practice along the way.

Even our youngest toddlers are offered the opportunity to sit on the toilet at each diaper change. OCC teachers and staff help the children as needed, by changing diapers (we do not use pull ups unless they have open/close tabs at the sides), helping them to use the toilet, and wiping. We also gently encourage children to move towards independence in this area.

Our expectation is that parents will work with us to support their child's growth toward independence in toileting with the goal of toileting and underwear by the time they enter our Primary Classrooms. There is a bathroom in each toddler classroom. Children in the upstairs Primary classrooms are supervised when they use the hallway bathrooms.

# **Forms and Documentation**

## **Emergency Contact Information**

At the beginning of the school year, or when your child enrolls, you will complete an Emergency Contact Form. This is kept in the office so we can reach you, if necessary. We have copies in each classroom, on the playscape, and available for field trip excursions.

Please make sure your emergency contact information is current at all times. Please notify us of changes in home, work, or cell phone numbers, physicians, and/or emergency contact individuals as soon as such changes occur.

## **Health Assessments**

All children enrolled at OCC are required to have a Health Assessment completed by their physician. This report must be submitted at enrollment and updated regularly. Children under 2 years old need an assessment every six months, and children ages 2 years and older need an assessment every twelve months. Immunization records (or “Refusal to Immunize” documentation) must also be on file.

## **All About Me Pages**

All families enrolled at OCC are asked to complete “All About Me” photo pages. These are displayed in the child’s classroom for them to enjoy and share with their friends. These forms are available online.

## **Accident Report**

If your child has sustained an injury during the day, you will receive a brief accident report via Transparent Classroom detailing the nature of the injury, how it occurred, and which staff members were present. You will receive an email with a link to the report to electronically sign. We will keep these records on file.

## **Medication Form**

If your child’s doctor prescribes medication that must be administered during school hours, please give the medication to the office. All medications must be in their original containers and kept in a locked location within the school. A signed paper Medication Form must be completed including administration instructions, dosage, and frequency, to be kept with the medication.

A Topical Ointment Authorization Form must be completed via TC for any lotions, creams, or lip balms to be applied to your child. Never send any medicine in your child’s lunchbox or backpack, even if he or she rides the Kindergarten bus. Cough drops, vitamins, lotions and lip balm are all considered medicinal and may not be in the possession of children at school.

## **Transfer of Records**

Requests for student records should be made in writing and addressed to the school’s office. All requests must include the signature of an authorized parent or guardian, granting their permission for the release of records. The signed written release should include the child’s name, birthdate, reason for the request, and address to which the documents should be sent.

# **Tuition and Fees**

## **Monthly Tuition**

Invoices will be emailed on the 1st of each month. Payment is due by the 15th of the month. A 3% late fee will be incurred if not paid by the 20th day of the month. If you are having financial difficulties and are unable to meet this obligation, please speak with the Head of School. All such information will be held in strictest confidence.

Our Children's Center's Tax ID # is 25-1815148 for tax or childcare reimbursement purposes.

Payments are accepted via check, bank bill-pay, or through the Quickbooks link on the statement. There is a 3% convenience fee for credit card payments via Quickbooks, and a 1% convenience fee for ACH payments through Quickbooks. Check payments may be mailed directly to the school, or handed to office staff during arrival or dismissal.

## **Returned Check Fees**

For all checks returned to OCC for any reason, families' accounts will be charged the amount equivalent to those fees incurred by OCC.

## **Late Fees**

Late pick-up fees are \$10 and then an additional \$5 per 5 minutes. Late pick-up fees after 5:15 pm are \$10 and an additional \$10 per 5 minutes.

## **Drop-In Fees**

When available, one-time visits to additional programs are welcome. Availability is based primarily on ratios and staffing. Please contact us ahead of time for availability. Fees for "drop-in" programming is as follows:

Before School (7:45 - 8:45 a.m.)	\$20
After School (3:15 pm - 4:00 pm)	\$15
After School (3:15 pm - 5:15 pm)	\$40

## **Financial Aid**

The OCC Scholarship program is supported through the following primary sources: Annual fundraising of the OCC Board of Directors; designated proceeds raised through the OCC Pre-Kindergarten Scholarship Fund (EITC); proceeds of the OCC Endowment fund, and other annual fundraising and grants specifically supporting scholarship at OCC. Eligibility for scholarship does not guarantee actual receipt of scholarship.

Applications for financial aid are available upon request. All such information will be held in strictest confidence.

## **Statement on Discipline**

Our Children's Center has a strong commitment to implementing discipline of students in a respectful, firm, and encouraging manner. It is our long-term goal to help children learn to be self-disciplined rather than merely monitored by adults.

The OCC Staff manual states that "No corporal punishment is ever to be implemented at school" (e.g., hitting, spanking, pushing, etc.) In addition, no psychological or humiliating punishment is ever to be implemented at school (e.g., denial of snack or lunch, threats of physical punishment, name-calling, intimidation, etc).

Children who present behavior problems are discussed at staff meetings and with the Head of School. Appropriate remedial strategies are based on systematic observation of the child and communication among staff and with parents.

Short-term solutions in the classroom may include the child staying near a teacher or removing themselves to a quiet place in the room to calm their bodies and consider more appropriate behavior options.

The establishment of clear limits and consistency in maintaining these limits goes a long way toward preventing problems from occurring and toward supporting the child's development of self-discipline.

# **Changes to Enrollment**

## **Classroom Transitions**

Occasionally during a child's enrollment in our program, a decision is made to transition into a new classroom. This decision is often a joint product of the child's development, teacher observation, parent input, and/or program specifications. This process begins with brief visits to the new classroom and these visits are elongated over time. The determination as to the duration of a transition is based solely on the individual needs of the child.

## **Schedule Changes**

Any request for a change in your child's schedule must be submitted in written form and be approved by the Head of School. Every attempt will be made to accommodate parental requests within the limits of our program restraints. However, should it be determined that it is not in the best interest of the child or the school, requests may be denied. Modifications to programming often involve a tuition rate change.

## **Withdrawal (Parent Request)**

If the withdrawal of a child is necessary for any reason, parents shall agree to provide OCC with two full month's written notice of such; otherwise, two months of tuition will be forfeited. Under special circumstances, and at the discretion of the Head of School, withdrawal requests due to a change in finances can be negotiated. If the date of a child's withdrawal is on or after March 1st, the remainder of the year's tuition is due.

## **Withdrawal (OCC Request)**

Rarely, the Head of School, after much thought and discussion with a family, may determine that OCC does not best suit the needs of a particular child and/or the school community. Parents will be given two week's notice to find alternative care. The Head of School will assist parents, as best they can, in finding a more suitable location for their child and/or refer the family to other agencies for assistance.

## Winter/Inclement Weather Closings

We follow the State College Area School District's decision when deciding to delay, cancel, or dismiss early due to weather. We will send out our own announcement as soon as possible, but you can also choose to follow local news sources or SCASD notifications for the most timely information.

### School Cancellation

If SCASD is closed, OCC will also close for the day.

### Delayed Opening

When SCASD calls for a two-hour delay due to inclement weather, OCC will open at 9:00am for Before School care and 9:45am for the main school day. The Kindergarten buses will still follow SCASD's two-hour delay. Please notify OCC by 9:00am whether you will be driving your kindergartener to school or if they will be riding the bus.

### Early Dismissal

Should SCASD dismiss early, OCC families will be notified as to our closing time. The safety of our families and staff is our primary goal in making these decisions.

## Emergency Plan

In the event of an emergency situation at the school, the school's response is defined in our Emergency Plan. Depending upon the circumstances of the emergency, we will use one of the following protective actions:

**In Place Sheltering:** Sudden occurrences- weather, hazardous materials or intruder related- may dictate that taking cover inside the building is the best immediate response.

**Immediate Evacuation:** Students will be evacuated via the "Fire Drill Routes" to a designated area away from the building. Once declared "All Clear," we will return to our classrooms. Should the situation require a complete evacuation of the facility, children will be taken to the facility St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 208 W Foster Avenue, State College, PA 16601.

**Modified Operations:** This may include cancellation/postponement of normal activities due to such things as weather or utility disruptions.

All of the above situations require the staff to follow specific instructions and procedures, including securing the emergency information binders. In an emergency, staff and resources will be focused on providing for the safety and wellbeing of children and staff. Once the situation has been resolved, parents will be contacted via phone and email as to the status and procedures for the safe release of their children.

## **Family Handbook Acknowledgement of Receipt and Review**

Please read, sign, and return to OCC's school office.

The Pennsylvania State Department of Education and The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services requires that all parents be made aware of the policies and procedures applicable to enrollment in our program. Please read the OCC Family Handbook in its entirety. Once completed, please acknowledge your receipt and understanding of the information included by signing and returning this form.

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Caretaker Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Family Handbook located at: [http://www.occmontessori.org/?page\\_id=1139](http://www.occmontessori.org/?page_id=1139)