

A note on language...

For simplicity, this document is entitled the “Parent Handbook.” But we recognize that families come in many shapes and forms. Our children may be reared by other family members, foster parents, or other non-relatives. Our use of the word “parent” is meant to be inclusive.



PREȘCHOOLS

PARENT
HANDBOOK

Confidentiality Notice: Each child’s folder including all enrollment information is kept in a locked filing cabinet. The site director, assistant director, and social worker are the only employees that have access to this information. Each child’s information is shared with the child’s teacher on a “need to know” basis.

Each teacher uses the Portage Guide to assess your child’s development. Open Door uses this assessment system because the assessment items are naturally occurring within the play based classroom, assessment activity planning can easily be individualized and involves parents. The Portage Guide materials support staff in thinking reflectively, ecologically, and in terms of their relationships and interactions with children and families. Your child’s Portage Guide is stored in a closed cabinet in their classroom. Your child’s current teachers and administrative staff have access to their portage assessment.

THE OPEN DOOR MISSION AND PHILOSOPHY

To nurture and inspire young children of diverse needs, economic levels and family backgrounds in an engaging educational environment.

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In 1975 an Austin couple searched in vain for a child care program that would accept both of their children, a toddler with Down syndrome and his preschool-aged sister. Determined to educate both children together, they founded the Open Door Preschools to provide the opportunity for children of different abilities to learn and grow together. Over the past more than thirty-two years, the Open Door's early focus on serving children with disabilities has broadened to include children with emotional, economic, and at-risk challenges as well. Yet the basic tenets remain intact: that segregation of children with disabilities is as harmful to the child and to the society as a whole as is segregation by race, age, color, religion, or sex; that all people benefit from interaction with others who are different from themselves; and that through working and playing in a setting in which each person is valued for his or her strengths, children learn to value different ideas, cultures, and people.

THE OPEN DOOR PROGRAM

We believe that the process for kindergarten-readiness and lifelong learning begins at birth.

Our program aims to meet the unique needs of each child, helping him or her develop a healthy self-esteem and achieve developmental milestones. Our curriculum—centered on *The Creative Curriculum* but drawing on many other resources and approaches—promotes children's awareness of the world around them and addresses cognitive, social, emotional, gross motor, and fine motor development. In addition to guided classroom

time and free play, which encourages spontaneity, creativity and the ability to make choices, we also encourage the children to develop self-help skills and social responsibility for their classmates.

Children have the opportunity for creative activities such as art, music, and creative movement, fine motor activities (which help the children learn the skills necessary to eventually learn to write), language development activities, discovery activities (which help children learn about nature and the world around them as well as prepare them for science later on), gross motor activities (to develop healthy bodies), building with many types of blocks and other manipulative toys (to help develop beginning math concepts) and cognitive activities (to help develop age-appropriate concept development).

The Open Door preschools target accreditation by the National Academy for the Education of Young Child (NAEYC). Accreditation is a lengthy process undertaken every five years. It involves staff self-evaluation, staff and parent evaluation of the program as a whole, and a site visit by an outside validator who confirms our self-evaluations. These national standards of quality help ensure that the children are being cared for in developmentally appropriate ways. In addition to the accreditation process, our schools typically receive the highest rating (four star) from WorkForce Solutions - Child Care Services.

The Open Door believes that children's natural curiosity and playfulness should be encouraged while helping the children learn to be responsible members of society. We want the children to have fun while at the Open Door. Positive guidance techniques are used to help the children interact appropriately with each other and with adults. These methods further the children's feelings of success and enhance their self-esteem.

The Open Door staff do not use or permit any forms of corporal punishment, verbal abuse or humiliating tactics in guiding children's behavior.

LOCATIONS, TUITION, DEPOSITS AND ENROLLMENT

Open Door has two preschools:

Open Door Central
1717 West 10th Street 78703
Phone: 477-9632
Fax: 477-4156

Open Door East
3804 Cherrywood Rd. 78722
Phone: 481-0775
Fax: 481-0808

Open Door Central is open Monday through Friday, from 7.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Open Door East is open from 7:15 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Current full-time monthly tuition rates are:

Three- to five-year-olds	\$675
Two-year-olds	\$725
One-year-olds	\$800
Infants	\$890

Tuition rates refer to the classrooms serving each age group and not to the age of the child. There is a \$30 non-refundable registration fee added on to a child's first month's tuition. Half-time tuition is 60% of full-time rates. There is a sibling discount of \$60, which is prorated for part-time care.

Each of the schools maintains its own waiting list. There is no fee to be put on the waiting list. Current Open Door families are given priority enrollment.

When a family is given a guaranteed start date, the parent or guardian must provide a \$150 deposit (same amount for both full-time and part time) to reserve the spot. They must also sign an agreement form which states the start date. If a family decides to cancel or defer enrollment, the deposit is forfeited. Deferring enrollment entails returning to the waiting list and again providing a deposit once a new start date is given. The spot will be held if the family opts to pay full tuition until the spot would be used. The deposit is waived for families on sliding scale, CCMS or another outside funding source. The deposit, if the child is enrolled, is refundable at the end of the child's tenure at Open Door, provided that at least one month's notice has been given and the family is current on tuition and other fees.

Spots will not be guaranteed for families who remove their children temporarily from the program (e.g., during the summer) unless tuition is paid in full for that period or that spot is filled temporarily by another child. If tuition in full is paid for the leave period, that space is reserved. If the spot is filled by another child during the leave period, a \$150 non-refundable reservation fee (per child) is required to guarantee re-enrollment. If a family removes a child from the program and does not continue to pay full tuition or pay the reservation fee (if the spot is being temporarily filled), re-enrollment is contingent on availability of a spot.

We require payment of each month's tuition in full on the first of the month (unless other arrangements have been agreed upon in advance). We charge a \$10.00 late fee after the fifth of the month. We also charge \$20.00 for any check returned by the bank for insufficient funds. There are no refunds for absences or

vacations. No spots will be held for a non-paid absence from the school (such as during the summer months).

Full tuition is due for the months of December and March, when we close for winter and spring breaks.

Tuition may be paid by check or money order and can be mailed to the office or placed in the tuition box provided at each site. We strongly discourage cash payments. Site directors will provide receipts for all tuition payments, upon request.

SCHOOL CALENDAR AND HOURS

Open Door Central is open from 7:30 a.m.- 5:30 p.m. Open Door East is open from 7:15 a.m. - 5:45 p.m. It is important that children arrive by 9.00 a.m. so that they may participate fully in the morning program as well as any morning field trips.

Half-day care is available on a limited basis. Half-day programs are either from the opening time until 12:30 p.m. or from 12:30 p.m. until closing. The Open Door has many children who attend a public school early childhood program in the morning. We are very happy to work with the staff of other programs to ensure that the children receive care consistent with their needs.

Our school pick-up policy is designed to protect the children and requires that children be released only to their parent(s) or other person(s) specifically designated in the Child Care Contract. Parents should notify the staff whenever someone other than a parent will be picking up the child. The staff checks the photo ID of anyone unknown to them who picking up a child, even though the parents have given their permission. The parent (or designated pick-up person) is required to sign the child in and out.

If you have an emergency that delays your arrival in picking up your child, please call the school. **There is a fee of \$1.00 for each minute after closing time that the parent is late. Mid-day pick-ups are also subject to a late fee.** (Staff members who remain to care for a child after closing should be paid immediately for that care.)

School Closings

School holidays:

- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving (two days)
- Winter holiday (two weeks to coincide with AISD break)
- Spring Break (five days to coincide with AISD break)
- Memorial Day
- Independence Day (or the weekday closest to a July 4 that falls on a weekend)
- 2 staff training days (one in the fall, one in the spring)

Closings due to weather

The school may also be closed on other days due to inclement weather. Whenever A.I.S.D. is closed due to weather conditions, the Open Door is also closed.

Public schools announce their closings on the television and radio by 7:00 a.m. *The Open Door will not be specifically mentioned. Whenever the Austin Independent School District's schools close due to weather, parents should also keep their children home.*

In the case of a late opening by AISD, you will be notified by your child's teacher (or by another parent via a "phone tree") whether the Open Door will also open late or if it will be closed for the day.

Summer Programs

The Central and East schools have a summer program for school-age children. Tuition is approximately \$125 a week and the program runs from approximately the beginning of June to mid-August, depending on the AISD calendar.

During the summer months, all classes have water play. This includes shallow wading pools, sprinklers, and sensory activities. Please check your enrollment packets for details and permission slips. The Open Door follows DFPS minimum standards regarding supervision and safety during swimming and water play.

We also require that you provide your child with swimsuits, towels, sunscreen and bug repellent. Please speak to your child's teacher about any special circumstances (e.g., being unable to go underwater because of ear tubes).

Safety and Health Requirements

Medications

Signed permission slips are required for all children needing medication while at the center. Exact instructions about dosage, time and days for giving the medication must be noted on the chart found in the office. All medication must be in the original container and prescribed by a physician for the use of the specific child.

Illnesses

The Open Door does not have the facilities to care for sick children. Children should not be brought to school when they are too ill or uncomfortable to participate in the normal daily activities (including outdoor play). Children who become sick at school must be picked up from school as quickly as possible to avoid exposing other children.

The Open Door's guidelines concerning when children are too ill be at school include an oral temperature of 100.4 degrees or higher or an armpit temperature of 99.4 degrees or higher; unexplained diarrhea; vomiting; unexplained rashes; general inability to participate in school activities; discharge from or crusting of the eyes; greenish discharge from the nose; and excessive coughing.

If your child contracts a contagious disease, please call the staff so that we can remain informed and respond appropriately to the other parents. The staff appreciates your calling to explain any absence—we miss your children when they are absent and are concerned if we do not know why.

Children must be fever-free and symptom-free for 24 hours before they can return to school. The only exception is when an ear infection has been diagnosed and the child has been on antibiotics for at least 24 hours.

The guidelines detailed above will be used to evaluate your child at school. When a staff member calls to say your child must be picked up, please do so as quickly as possible. If you have questions concerning the legitimacy of the call, please speak to the director about them at another time. Staff may call a parent to alert them that their child is not feeling well even though the parent is not required to pick up the child at that time. Some parents choose to pick up their child at these times while others appreciate being informed that a visit to the doctor might be needed.

Immunizations

The immunization schedule for infants begins at one month. Recommended immunizations for age groups 0-6 years are:

1-2 months: one dose HepB vaccine; one dose Rota vaccine; one dose DTaP vaccine; one dose Hib vaccine; one dose Pneumococcal vaccine (PCV); one dose polio vaccine (IPV)

4 months: one dose Rota vaccine; one dose DTaP vaccine; one dose Hib vaccine; one dose PCV vaccine; one dose IPV vaccine

6-18 months: one dose HepB vaccine; one dose Rota vaccine; two doses DTaP vaccine; one dose Hib vaccine; two doses PCV vaccine; one dose IPV vaccines; begin annual Influenza vaccine; one dose Measles, Mumps Rubella vaccine (MMR); one dose Varicella vaccine; begin two doses HepA vaccine at 12-23 months

19-23 months: continue annual Influenza vaccine; complete HepA vaccine series (two doses 12-23 months)

2-3 years: catch up any missed HepB and Hib vaccines; continue annual Influenza vaccine

4-6 years: catch up any missed HepB and Hib vaccines; one dose DTaP vaccine; one dose IPV vaccine; one dose MMR vaccine; one dose Varicella vaccine; continue annual Influenza vaccine

Guidelines for Other Conditions or Situations

Lice. Children with lice may return only after special shampoo has been used and all live nits have been removed, as verified by the site director or designated staff.

Allergies. Parents should provide the school with a list of all known allergies. Please talk with your child's teacher about symptoms and any signs to be alert for.

Emergencies. In the case of a critical illness or injury, your physician will be contacted for instructions and you will be contacted as quickly as possible. If you or your physician cannot be reached, the child will be taken to the Emergency Room at Dell Children's Hospital. EMS will be contacted when appropriate.

The Texas Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and DFPS also require that children aged four years and above receive hearing and vision screening, which is provided on-site.

Pets

Any classroom pets are required by DFPS to be certified in good health by a qualified veterinarian. The same criteria applies to family pets who may be brought to visit the school (e.g., as a "show and tell" opportunity). The pet may not simply be dropped off at the school and left for the day.

Field Trips

Field trips are a fun part of the Open Door program. Notices about field trips will always be posted at least 48 hours in advance of the trip. Parents are required to sign a permission form so that their child will be able to go on the field trip. Please talk to your child's teacher about field trip schedules and where to look for the permission form.

Each school has a 15-passenger van, which is used for most field trips. Occasionally, several classes want to take a field trip on the same day and we ask for parent volunteers to drive their cars for the trip. All children will be strapped into a seat belt or car seat during field trips, whether they are in the school van or a private vehicle.

Because the field trips are very exciting for the children, they are a wonderful topic of discussion for you and your child. Children often have trouble discussing what has happened during a routine day, so field trips offer the opportunity to engage your child in an interesting conversation.

Toys

The schools have many developmentally appropriate toys for the children's use during the school day. Some children enjoy bringing toys from home. Children are encouraged to bring toys or other objects from home on "Show and Tell" days. While we do not encourage toys on other days, we realize they are one way in which children ease their transition from home to school. The teachers try to help the children develop a sense of responsibility about their belongings, but home toys are the child's responsibility at school and they may be lost or damaged. Parents should not allow any irreplaceable items to come to school.

We are always happy for the children to share books, pictures, or items from nature (birds' nests, rocks, fossils, etc.) with their class. *We do not allow war toys or toys whose main theme is violence.*

Clothing and Other Supplies

Children should be dressed in play clothes appropriate for the season and the weather conditions. *Please keep in mind that your child may be involved in very messy activities at school.* The teachers try to take precautions to protect the children's clothing, but our first concern is that the children enjoy the activity, not that they keep their clothes clean. Special clothing, those which the parents prefer remain in good condition, is not appropriate for school wear.

All children should have at least one change of seasonally-appropriate clothes at the school at all times. It is important that the parents bring enough extra clothes to last the entire day—i.e., for some children, one change will last a whole week while for others this may mean enough for four or five changes each day. Please evaluate your child's needs realistically and furnish enough clothing. All items should be labeled with the child's name to avoid loss and confusion.

The Open Door accepts both cloth and disposable diapers. Parents who use cloth diapers need to bring plastic bags for the soiled diapers.

Parents provide crib sheets and blankets for children in the Infant Room. It is the parent's responsibility to make up the child's crib each Monday and launder the bedding at the end of the week. Older children need a small sheet and blanket. They are welcome to bring a small pillow or stuffed animal for nap time.

Meals and Nutrition

Parents of two-month- to one-year-olds must provide all of the food their child requires for the day. Two- to five-year-old children receive a nutritious snack provided by the school each morning and afternoon. Parents are required to send a lunch every day.

The Open Door has a very strict policy of providing and serving **nutritious food only**. Children learn best if their nutritional needs are being met. We do not allow foods providing only “empty” calories (e.g., treats, candy, cookies, gum, drinks containing sugar and most types of chips). The reason for our policy is to avoid tempting children to fill up on empty calories thereby depriving themselves of the healthy fuel needed to develop strong bodies and minds. If any of these types of foods are sent to school, the staff will not serve them to your child.

We may ask that you not send peanut products or peanut butter to school if one of your child’s classmates is highly allergic.

If you are uncertain what kinds of food are appropriate, please talk to your child’s teacher or the site director. We want to work with you to ensure that your child receives the protein, vitamins, minerals and carbohydrates he or she needs to remain healthy. The Department of Health and Human Services requires that children in care for more than six hours be provided with at least half of their daily food requirements, including a daily serving of a Vitamin C-rich food, such as orange juice, baked potato, cauliflower, cabbage or greens. Each child needs from one-quarter to one-third cup of one of these foods each day.

Please remember that the teachers are helping many children eat their meals. Foods should be sent as “ready to eat” as

possible—for example, already peeled and cut into bite sized pieces, if necessary. Microwaves are sometimes available to warm food, but the teachers cannot heat every child’s lunch every day. Directors and teachers may choose not to use microwaves in order to maximize teacher-children contact during lunchtime. Please talk with your child’s teacher about foods that need refrigeration; each center has a different storage capacity.

Please use plastic containers to avoid the danger of broken bottles, bowls or plates. The teachers try their best to return all containers but please understand that our first priority is to care for the children, and getting each container back to its proper lunch box is a secondary concern.

Please remember to label everything.

We encourage breastfeeding mothers to come feed their babies at school as much as they are able. If you need to breastfeed at the end of the day, please try to arrive early enough so that your child will be able to leave when the school day ends.

PARENT COMMUNICATION

Each school has a parent bulletin board for important program information. Each child has a personal cubby and/or file folder, which may also contain newsletters, notes or notices. Parents are reminded to check each of these places daily in order to keep informed and up-to-date about plans and changes. These notices, notes and newsletters will also inform you of any personnel, policy or other changes you should know about our school. Parents sometimes choose to communicate with one another and with the school via e-mail.

Parent Meetings

The schools have several parent meetings and/or events each year. Some events, such as the Fall Festival, are designed specifically for the children while others are more social in nature (e.g., potluck suppers). These provide the opportunity for parents and staff to get to know one another and for the parents of children in the same class to meet. It is important for parents to participate in these events as we try to foster a sense of community.

Staff meetings

An important aspect of the Open Door program is the regular staff meeting. These meetings provide staff with time to discuss program issues, to exchange information about the children and to receive specialized training. Parents of children at the Open Door are expected to help with coverage during these meetings. For some groups of children, the parents may be asked to come several times in one semester. A staff member also provides supervision during these meetings to ensure that emergencies are handled appropriately.

Conferences

We believe that there should be ample opportunity for parents to talk to staff about your child. We welcome your visits and your comments. However, it is advisable to have extended or serious discussions concerning your child without the child present. We schedule conferences either at request of either the parent or the teacher, and we expect parents to attend one parent conference near the end of each semester.

We expect communication between staff and families to remain as positive as possible. Conferences allow for an in-depth discussion of difficult issues and should allow a break from moments of immediate friction. Open Door staff retain the right to refuse services to individuals who are verbally abusive to staff or unwilling to follow program guidelines.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The cost of providing care exceeds the amount parents are charged in tuition. One way we are able to keep tuition lower is by involving the parents in helping with the upkeep of the school. Donations of supplies (crayons, washable markers, stickers, glue, surplus paper, computer paper, baby wipes, tissue, paper towels, juice, crackers, etc.) are always appreciated. Some parents choose to make a monthly donation to the supply fund for the purchase of new toys and equipment. All these donations help the school continue to provide the highest quality of care at the most reasonable price possible. All donations beyond tuition are tax-deductible (the Open Door's Tax ID# is 74-1834374).

Parents also help on workdays scheduled twice each year. These days are usually devoted to major maintenance tasks such as painting, repairing toys and shelves, repairing playground equipment, spreading sand, as well as major cleaning projects. Not only do these days help keep the schools in the best condition possible, they also help the children realize that their school is important to their parents as well as to their teachers.

Our doors are always open for families to visit their child/children at any time during regular hours. We urge parents to consider the impact their visit may have on their child if he/she has difficulty with transitions and/or separations. We do discourage families from visiting during naptime. Please talk with your teacher about any concerns regarding visits or if you would like to participate in a particular lesson with a class.

In addition to serving on the board of directors, parents are welcome to serve on Board committees. The Board and the Executive Director participate in many fundraising activities throughout the year, but their efforts at times need to be supplemented by the parents. The school usually organizes two

fundraisers, one in the fall and one in the spring. The parents are essential partners in each of these events. We encourage all parents to participate either by donating time, goods, or money.

PARENT QUESTIONS AND SOCIAL WORKER AVAILABILITY

If you have questions or concerns about the program, please be sure to talk with your child's teacher. If you need more information, the site director is available to meet with you to discuss your concerns. Because our directors also teach, it is best to schedule these meetings for the afternoon. Some policies or questions may need to be directed to the Executive Director, who can be reached at 481-0775. Please feel free to call on the Executive Director whenever you have a concern the site director is unable to address fully. The Board of Directors is also available for hearing concerns; they reserve time for parent communication at each board meeting. The Secretary of the board has been designated as the contact for parents with problems or concerns. A list of current board members is available at each school.

We have part-time social workers devoted to serving the needs of all the families at the Open Door. The social worker often meets with families when they first enroll. Parents can contact the social worker with their concerns at any time. The social worker can provide parents with information and referrals, short-term crisis counseling, family support and emergency food and clothing. The social worker remains available to all families, regardless of income or specific needs.

E-mail is often the most efficient means of communication:

Executive Director: elsner@opendoorpreschool.org

Open Door Central: opendoorcentral@grandecom.net

Open Door East: east@opendoorpreschool.org

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The Open Door is operated by Project Normalization, Inc., a non-profit corporation governed by a volunteer board of directors. The board meets at least seven times a year and includes interested community members as well as parents. The board is a policy-making body which is also responsible for the school's financial management.

The Executive Director heads the organization and reports to the board. The administrative team (the Executive Director, the Site Directors from each center, Education Director, Development Director, and Social Workers) works together to ensure that the program functions smoothly on a day-to-day basis. They meet monthly to share information and address common concerns.

The City of Austin, Travis County and the United Way provide assistance, as do private foundations and individual contributors. Parents help with several fundraising events each year. However, the organization is funded primarily by parent tuition. These tuition payments are used to pay staff salaries and benefits, rent, insurance, utilities, and education materials.

DFPS Information

The most recent copy of Minimum Standards for Licensed Child-Care Centers required by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) is available in the office. Child Care Licensing can be reached at (512) 908-9610, P.O. Box 15995, Austin, Texas, 78762. Website www.dfps.state.tx.us, Child abuse hotline 1 -800-252-5400

We welcome your comments, suggestions or questions at any time.

Thank you for entrusting your children to us.