



Family Handbook

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Our Mission

In pursuit of educational equity, Open Door Preschools nurtures and inspires young children of diverse abilities, circumstances, and backgrounds in a child-led, play-based environment.

Our Values

Child-Led: We celebrate the humanity and individuality of children, encouraging them to discover and create their own worlds.

Village: The Open Door community creates and nurtures a village of safety, love, kindness, and inclusion.

Play: We delight in our time together, knowing that the best learning happens through play.

Equity: As a progressive childcare provider, Open Door Preschools is deliberately diverse and intentionally inclusive. We advocate for equity and are dedicated to ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality early education.

Our History

Open Door Preschools was founded in 1975 by a family who saw a need in our community and chose to fill it — creating the change they wanted to see in the world. We began with just nine children, and, over the past 46 years, our schools have changed with Austin. In that time, we have served thousands of children in different locations. What has not changed is our deep respect for childhood and our commitment to providing the best early experiences for our community.

Our values and goals begin with the individual children whose lives can be transformed in our schools, reaching out from them — from the child and family — to our schools, to our organization, and to our community.

All Open Door Preschools are accredited (or working towards accreditation) by the National Association for the Education of Young Child (NAEYC). This is a lengthy process undertaken every five years involving staff and parent evaluation of the program as a whole, and a site visit by an outside validator. 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 reach the 4-star Texas Rising Star rating through Workforce.

Our Strategic Goals

- ★ Create an exceptional and equitable child-centered experience with every family
- ★ Foster professional collaboration to ensure consistent experiences across classrooms and campuses and hone our model
- ★ Invest in operational adaptability and stability as we meet the needs of a changing city
- ★ Showcase and maintain Open Door Preschools' leadership record and continued commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Early Education

Curriculum

We believe life-long learning and kindergarten readiness begins at birth. Our program aims to meet the unique needs of each child, developing healthy self-esteem and reaching appropriate developmental milestones. Our curriculum draws on various resources and approaches, promoting developmentally-appropriate practice for all of our teachers. In addition to guided classroom time, children actively engage in free play daily. While gross and fine motor skills, along with child-led academic interests are supported, our teachers have a particular focus on developing social-emotional skills with every child at Open Door.

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

- Fred Rogers

Emergent Curriculum

We use curriculum that is emergent. This means:

- lessons are based on a topic that may be determined by the teacher, but the teacher then follows the children's interests.
- lesson plans are not predetermined or prescribed but often a work in progress.
- approaches are designed to meet needs based on group temperaments and learning styles.
- topics take into account children's family and cultural backgrounds.
- lesson plans are based on observation of the children's abilities and interests

Classroom Activities Include

- Free-choice time (indoor and outdoor)
- Group or circle time
- Space and time for quiet and reflection
- Center time: Library, Sensory, Science, Imaginative Play, Math, Art and Writing (developmentally appropriate activities)
- Some field trips to community events and establishments

Media and Technology

- We avoid commercialism in all media and television.
- Computer games are limited to those that are instructional and developmentally appropriate in some older-age classrooms.
- Screen time is limited for all children.

Weapon Play

- We recognize that children have a need to pretend superhero games.
- Although we allow superhero games, we do not allow the children to use pretend weapons. Weapons stay at home.

Commercialism

- We never use commercial symbols or branded images, games, art or activities in our environment.

Attendance Policy

We understand that families often prefer to seize every moment they get to spend quality family time with their children. Because of this, **we do not have a strict attendance policy***. Please understand that for children to benefit fully from the Open Door experience, they should consistently attend for the full day. When children miss too many days, they miss out on experiences that enhance their developing skills. We encourage parents to bring their children early enough in the day so that they can fully engage in the program and not disrupt the classroom flow - for most classrooms, by 9:30am.

**families receiving Workforce support for tuition have attendance requirements set by the local Workforce boards.*

Toys

Every Open Door classroom has high-quality, developmentally-appropriate toys for all children. Children are encouraged to bring toys or other objects from home on "Show and Tell" days ONLY.

While we do not encourage toys on other days, it can help some children ease their transition from home to school. Please be aware that toys from home may be lost or damaged. **Parents should not allow any irreplaceable items to come to school.**

Behavior Management Policy

Positive guidance techniques are used to help the children interact appropriately with each other and with adults.

Open Door staff do not use or permit:

- forms of corporal punishment
- verbal abuse or humiliating tactics

If a child's behavior is repeatedly dangerous or oppositional to positive guidance, Open Door staff will use best practice techniques to assist the child in reengaging and successfully interacting with other children and staff.

Some of the techniques used are:

- Redirection
- Offering positive, appropriate alternative activities
- Natural or logical consequences
- Conferencing with parents or guardians to build positive strategies and reinforcement

In rare circumstances, a child's behavior may become extremely disruptive or the child may become a danger to themselves, the other children or the staff.

In the case of increasingly disruptive or dangerous behaviors, Open Door staff will collaborate with the parents to create an individual plan for their child. When appropriate, Open Door staff will help link families to community resources. Regular reviews of the plan will occur in team meetings of the Open Door staff and parents, with areas of progress and continued need being documented. Failure to meet the obligations under the behavior plan may result in the child being referred to another provider better able to meet the child's needs.

Schedules, Tuition, Deposits and Enrollment

Central	M Station (East)	North
1717 West 10 th Street 78703 512-477-9632	2918 East MLK 78702 512-610-7383	11704 North Lamar 78753 512-866-3144
Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Monday - Friday 7:15 a. m. to 5:45 p.m.	hours TBD
Missy Sanchez missy@opendoorpreschool.org	Danni Dieckman danni@opendoorpreschool.org	

Waitlist and Enrollment

Prioritized enrollment is reserved for current Open Door families, children with disabilities, and families receiving TWC tuition subsidy. Waitlist applications are made with the director of each school. Tours for interested parents and prospective parents must be arranged in advance.

Once a family has been offered a confirmed spot parents complete an Enrollment Packet via Brightwheel link, and make deposit/tuition arrangements. Families must also sign an agreement form which states the start date. **The enrollment deposit is \$500.00/child (non-refundable).** Deferring enrollment entails returning to the waitlist 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. Fees are waived for families receiving tuition assistance.

Tuition Policy

- **Tuition rates refer to the classrooms serving each age group and not to the age of the child.**
- Current tuition rates are posted widely and charged through Brightwheel.
- There is a sibling discount of \$100 per month for a second child enrolled.
- Tuition must be paid in full on the first of the month (unless other arrangements have been agreed upon in advance).
- Open Door charges a \$10.00 late fee after the fifth of the month.
- \$20.00 charge for any denied payment.

- There are no refunds for absences or vacations.
- Tuition and other charges are shown in your Brightwheel account, and may be paid via ACH, credit card (with additional fee) or in the office by check or money order.
- We strongly discourage cash payments.
- Receipts or other documentation needed for benefits plans are available via Brightwheel.

Calendar

Each year's calendar is posted on our website with multiple reminders sent by Site Directors and teachers to families. Generally, we observe the following holidays and school breaks:

- Winter Holidays (two weeks to coincide with AISD calendar)
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Spring Break (follow AISD calendar)
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- Independence Day
- 2 all-staff training days (one in the fall, one in the spring)
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving (Thursday and Friday)

Drop-off and Pick-up Policy

- Designated pick-up adults are required to sign the child in and out daily.
- Children may be released only to their parent(s) or other person(s) specifically designated in the enrollment forms.
- Families should notify staff whenever someone other than a parent will be picking up the child.
- Staff will check the photo ID of anyone unknown to them who is picking up, even if caregivers have given their permission.
- In an emergency that delays your arrival in picking up your child, please call the school.
- **There will be a fee of \$1.00 for each minute after closing time that the caregiver is late.**
- Staff members who remain to care for the child after closing should be paid immediately for that care.

Closings Due to Weather

In general, Open Door follows the decisions of AISD in regard to inclement weather closures and delays. We may at times diverge from this guideline when we believe that the health and safety of our children, families, and staff will not be compromised.

In the event of a closure or delay, please follow email and text notifications closely via Brightwheel and email.

Safety and Health

Sleep Policies

We provide at least 2 hours daily of rest/nap time for all children. Children who do not fall to sleep are allowed to participate in a quiet activity such as reading books.

Infant Sleep

Infants set their own sleep schedules. When placed in their cribs to sleep, they are placed lying on their backs. No items are allowed in cribs with infants during napping; this includes, but is not limited to blankets, toys, plush toys, pillows, and music boxes.

Medications

Signed permission slips are required for all children needing medication while at school (including creams). Exact instructions about dosage, time and days for giving the medication must be noted on the chart found in your child's classroom or in the office. All medication must be in the original container and prescribed by a physician for the use of the specific child.

Illnesses

Open Door does not provide 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.

Children will be sent home if they have:

- a fever of 100.4 or higher taken orally or 99.4 or higher taken under the arm
- unexplained diarrhea or vomiting
- unexplained rashes
- general inability to participate in school activities
- discharge from or crusting of the eyes
- greenish discharge from the nose
- excessive coughing.

When your child contracts a contagious disease, please call staff so we can remain informed and respond appropriately to other families. When possible, please communicate to explain any absence – we miss your children when they are absent and are concerned if we don't know why.

Children must be fever-free, typically 98.6; 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.

Guidelines detailed above will be used to evaluate your child at school. When you are called with a report of symptoms and pick up is requested, please do so as quickly as possible. 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 when a doctor visit may be needed.

Policy on Vaccinations for Children and Staff

The reality of living through a pandemic has underscored the importance of vaccinations in young children. **Children not vaccinated, for medical or any other reasons, must furnish a signed affidavit** per child care licensing standards.

Open Door employees with routine contact with children must provide proof of vaccinations or documented exceptions for their personnel file.

If you choose not to vaccinate your child due to personal reasons (not medically-required or religious belief) you will be required to complete an affidavit about this decision in accordance with childcare licensing. While Open Door does not refuse such children at this time, public health emergencies may dictate that we take steps to minimize the health risk posed to those in our care. Such steps may include, but are not limited to, refusing enrollment or attendance at Open Door for a period of time.

Immunization Schedule

Open Door is a licensed childcare facility in the state of Texas, and we require the standard immunization schedule (with specific exemptions as mentioned above) Details are available here:

<https://www.dshs.texas.gov/immunize/school/pdf/6-15-2022-2023-MinReq-Child-Care-PreK-1.pdf>

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 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.

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 onsite.

Pets

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).

Field Trips

Field trips are a fun part of our program. Notices about field trips will always be posted at least 48 hours in advance. Caregivers are required to sign a permission form in order for their children to go on field trips.

Open Door has vans which are 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 vehicle. All children must be strapped into a booster or car seat during field trips, whether they are in the school van or in a private vehicle.

Clothing and Other Supplies

Each day, children should wear play clothes appropriate for the season and the expected weather conditions. Keep in mind that your child may be involved in very messy activities at school. Special clothing, those which the parents prefer remain in good condition, is not appropriate for school wear.

Each child should have at least one change of seasonally-appropriate clothes at school at all times. Please ensure your child has enough extra clothes to last the entire day – i.e., for some, one change will last a week while others may require four or five changes a day. **All items should be labeled with the child's name to avoid loss or confusion.**

Open Door accepts both cloth and disposable diapers. **Families who use cloth diapers need to bring an outer covering or liner and plastic bags for the soiled diapers.**

Caregivers provide crib sheets and blankets for children in the Infant Room. It is the family's responsibility to make up the child's crib each Monday and launder the bedding at home at the end of the week.

Older children need a small sheet and blanket for naps. They are welcome to bring a small pillow or stuffed animal for naptime. These should be brought home and laundered weekly.

Families should **provide sunscreen and insect repellent for their child each day.** Children should arrive on most days with their first application of sunscreen already applied.

Meals and Nutrition

We believe nutritious foods are critical to the healthy growth and development of children in our care. Children learn and play best if their nutritional needs are met, so ours is a strict policy - **we only allow nutritious foods to be served at Open Door.**

We strongly encourage parents to avoid sending highly-processed foods, or foods with artificial dyes or sweeteners. Whole-grain breads and pastas, fresh fruits and vegetables, and freshly prepared, non-processed foods are strongly preferred.

NOT allowed at Open Door:

- Packaged foods with a sugar in the first 3 ingredients listed
- Candy
- Cookies
- Chocolate
- Gum
- Drinks containing sugar
- Most processed chips
- Sugared cereals
- Sugar Sweetened milk
- Sugar free desserts (Sugar free Jell-O, pudding, yogurt, etc.)

Please note: if any of these foods are sent to school, staff will not serve them to your child and will return them home.

Suggestions:

- Pretzels
- Fruit leathers (and similar items) that are made with 100% real fruit.
- Granola Bars
- Whole-grain cereal w/o added sugar
- Yogurt (without sugar in first 3 ingredients)

Please talk with your child's teachers, Family CARES staff, or your site director if you need ideas or assistance with affordable healthy meals to send.

Snacks

Each day, Open Door provides 2 nutritious snacks to all of our children. Our goal is to serve snacks from various food groups, and expose children to new foods and different tastes.

Other Important Nutrition-Related Guidelines

- Parents of children ages two months to one year old must provide ALL food their child requires for the day.
- We encourage and support breastfeeding mothers. You are welcome to feed your child at school as much as they are able. If you need to breastfeed at the end of the day, please make sure to arrive early enough so that your child will be able to leave when the school day ends.
- Please **send your child to school with a refillable water bottle every day.** In addition, you may send your child to school with milk to drink.
- Infant and toddler classrooms have refrigerators. In other rooms, please send lunches in a bag that can keep items cool and safe for eating.
- Certain Classrooms are PEANUT or NUT FREE because a student or adult in the class has a nut allergy. If your child is in one of these classrooms, we ask that you not send any peanut

products, peanut butter or nut products to school. PEANUT-FREE or NUT-FREE classroom signage will be displayed.

- Do NOT send breakable containers for children's food - plastic or metal ONLY.
- **Foods should be sent as “ready to eat” as possible** (for example, already peeled and cut into bite sized pieces, if necessary. Teachers are not able to prepare individual servings for each child in the room.
- Foods that are not cooked yet or need to be warmed should not be sent to school.
- Foods meant to be hot should be sent in a thermos. **We do not heat food in microwaves.**

Updating Information

Your contact information and specifics for who we should contact if you cannot be reached in an emergency is critical. When changes in such information happen, please update Brightwheel info immediately. Each September, we will provide reminders to update contact information.

The Use of Pesticides

As part of our commitment to provide your child with a safe, pest-free learning environment, Open Door Preschool may periodically apply pesticides to help manage insects. Such treatments are part of our integrated pest management program, which relies largely on non-chemical forms of pest control. Pesticide applications at Open Door Preschool are made only by trained and licensed technicians. We arrange to have treatment done while the children are not in attendance. A “Notice of Pest Control Treatment” sign is placed on the front door after applications.

Emergency Preparedness

Our schools all have regular fire and weather drills. Each room has an emergency exit map and is assigned to a specific evacuation area outside. Adults and children move to the safest place in the building in the event of a severe weather warning.

In the event of the need to evacuate the property all together, each school has an evacuation destination. Check with your center for information about the evacuation site for your particular location.

Caregiver Participation and Family CARES

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; and school-wide, child-specific, or classroom-specific messages can also be sent via Brightwheel.

Please check messages daily in order to keep informed and up-to-date about plans and changes.

Notices, notes and newsletters will also inform you of any personnel, policy, or other changes you should know about our school.

Family Meetings

Each school may host several parent meetings and/or events each year. Some events are designed specifically for the children while others are more adult-oriented, in which case childcare will be provided.

These opportunities for families and staff to get to know one another and for the caregivers to socialize. Participation is important in building connections for each Open Door village.

Staff Meetings

Regular staff meetings are an important part of our high-quality program. These provide staff with time to discuss program issues, exchange information and learning, and receive specialized training.

Conferences

We aim for regular opportunities for caregivers and staff to talk about their children. Our doors are always open to families for visits and conversation. If you need to have a serious or extended discussion concerning your child, we ask that you schedule a time to talk to the teacher without your child present. Regularly scheduled parent conferences should happen twice yearly. However, **at any time you may request a conference with the teacher or the teacher may request a conference with you.**

Family Involvement

Open Door's model as a nonprofit preschool means that the full cost of providing our level of care exceeds the amount individual parents are charged in tuition. Financial donations or gifts of needed materials are always appreciated and help reduce our costs - please check with your teacher or director for an online wishlist of such items.

Some caregivers may have interest in serving on the Open Door Board of Directors, or on our fundraising/event committee. The Board and the Executive Director participate in several fundraising activities each year, and such efforts help make our Family CARES program, Helping Hand tuition assistance, and Family and Staff Emergency Assistance possible.

Family CARES Staff Availability

We have a part-time Family CARES program staff at each school who are devoted to serving the needs of all the families at Open Door. They can provide parents with information and referrals, family support, emergency food and clothing. They are also available to help parents through the process of applying for tuition or emergency assistance.

Concerns or Questions

If you have questions or concerns about the program, please be sure to talk with your child's teacher. If more information is needed, our site directors are always available to meet to discuss your concerns.

Families are also welcome to contact the Executive Director when needed via email - - cynthia@opendoorpreschool.org - whenever you have a concern the site director is unable to address fully. If needed, a list of current board members is available at each school and on our website.

Nonprofit Organization Structure

Open Door Preschools is 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 family members. The board is a policy making body and is also responsible for the school's financial management.

The Executive Director heads the organization and reports to the board. The administrative team 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.

Open Door receives financial support as a United Way partner agency, and also from private foundations, corporations, a bingo hall, and individual donors. However, our budget is primarily funded through tuition. These tuition payments are used to pay staff salaries and benefits, rent, insurance, utilities, and supplies.

Babysitting Policy

We understand that families want a trusted adult to care for your children at home. In that situation, many parents turn to their children's teachers. Our teachers often care for children after hours and often prefer to care for children that they already know and have an attachment with. It is a win-win situation. This is allowed by Open Door, however families must sign an acknowledging receipt of our babysitting policy first.

If you want to hire one of our teachers for home child care, please ask the teacher or an administrator for the Babysitting Policy form to sign.

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services 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

www.dfps.state.tx.us

Child Abuse Hotline

1-800-252-5400



Receipt of Written Operational Policies/Parent Handbook

I acknowledge receipt of the operational policies including those for:

- Hours, days, and months of operation and holidays
- Discipline and guidance
- Procedures for release of children
- Illness and exclusion criteria
- Medical causes for disallowing attendance
- Procedures for parental notification
- Procedures for handling medical needs
- Procedures for dispensing medications
- Immunization requirements
- Hearing and vision screening requirements
- Procedures for expressing concerns or questions
- Opportunities for parent participation
- Nutrition, meals and snacks
- Sunscreen and insect repellent use

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date