

PARENT HANDBOOK

The Gathering Academic Preschool



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About Us

Our Mission

To make a quality, affordable Christian education available to as many children as possible.

Our Guiding Principles



Christ-Centered

We believe that it is important for children to have a solid faith-based education in the classroom to help shape them. While students will learn about many different countries, cultures, and religions, we are a Christian preschool that will teach kids about the love and grace of God, made evident in Jesus Christ.



Social Development

Students are not encouraged to compete but to cooperate, to learn together, help each other, and develop friendships that will aid in their social and moral development.



Interactive

Students learn best when they can use their senses of taste, touch, sight, sound and smell to interact with the material that they are learning. This helps them move from understanding concrete to abstract principles.



Holistic

Students are more than their minds. We seek to create an environment that teaches and nurtures their spiritual, physical, social and cognitive development.



Taking Ownership

The love of learning begins with the willingness of a child to engage in the educational environment. Students must be active participants in the learning process, taking ownership of their ability to learn and focusing their gifts in the classroom. In this light, we encourage all children to be self-directed learners. We also ask parents to help nurture this natural curiosity and independence in their children.

“Train children in the way they should go; when they grow old, they will not depart from it.”
Proverbs 22:6

About Us

The vision for this school began in the summer of 2012 when a group at The Gathering UMC realized that we couldn't afford to send our children to a top-quality preschool to prepare them for public school. So we set out to create a quality Christian, Montessori Preschool that is both affordable and innovative for all children in Virginia Beach. In 2015 the Preschool Executive Committee and Executive Council for The Gathering UMC decided to open an additional preschool campus because Beach Gathering Montessori Preschool had reached capacity. We are excited to be offering a quality Christian Academic Preschool program to the neighborhood surrounding Heritage United Methodist Church on Baker Road. In 2017 we moved away from the Montessori curriculum and both schools are now named The Gathering Academic Preschool. It is our mission to continue to offer top-quality care for our students from infants to school-age children.

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.
Nelson Mandela

Affiliation: The Gathering United Methodist Church

The Gathering Academic Preschool is run and operated by The Gathering at Scott Memorial United Methodist Church. The Gathering UMC began in 2010 and meets on Sunday mornings at 409 First Colonial Rd. You can find out more about The Gathering at our website, www.thegatheringumcvb.com The Gathering Academic Preschool is located inside of Foundry United Methodist Church at 2801 Virginia Beach Blvd. Foundry United Methodist Church provides us with classrooms for each of our classes as well as a playground for our program. The Gathering at Scott Memorial United Methodist church maintains liability insurance for our program.

Licensing Information

The Gathering Academic Preschool operates under Section 63.2-1716 of the *Code of Virginia*, which exempts from licensure any child day centers operated under a religious institution. Our programs annually file documentation with the Virginia Department of Social Services pertaining to our child/staff ratios, fire and health inspections, and other codes as outlined by the *Code of Virginia*.

Participation Guidelines

The Gathering Academic Preschool accepts children without regard to race, creed, religion, marital status of parent(s), sex, ethnic, or national origin. A diverse environment enriches the learning experience for children by providing exposure to different cultures and backgrounds.

School Administration

The Gathering Academic Preschool is affiliated with The Gathering United Methodist Church and is located at Foundry United Methodist Church. The Preschool has an Executive Committee which oversees the school. The established lines of authority are as follows:

The Gathering United Methodist Church

Pastor

The Gathering Academic Preschool

Preschool Executive Committee

Executive Director

Teachers

Staff Qualifications

The staff of The Gathering Academic Preschool is hired based on a combination of education and/or childcare related experience. Each employee undergoes a criminal background check, a central registry check, and receives a health assessment prior to working directly with your children.

Staff members are required to receive 16 hours of annual training pertaining to best practices when working with children. Most staff members will become certified in CPR and First Aid within their first 30 days of employment. Additional staff are trained in medication administration.

Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

Section 63.1-248.3 of the *Code of Virginia* requires any person providing full or part-time child care for pay on a regular planned basis to report any suspected child abuse or neglect.

Program Size & Ratios

Our program is authorized to have up to 58 students in the school each day.

Minimum staff to participant ratios required by Social Services:

- 6 wks-16 mths 1 staff to every 4 children
- 16 mths-24 mths 1 staff to every 5 children
- 2 years-3 years 1 staff to every 8 children
- Ages 3-5 1 staff to every 10 children
- Ages 5-9 1 staff to every 25 children

Our Programs

"The greatness of the human personality begins at the moment of birth, so education must start from birth." – Maria Montessori

Curriculum

In all of our classrooms we utilize the Virginia Milestones of Child Development, The Virginia Foundation Blocks for Early Learning, and the Virginia Beach Public Schools Kindergarten Transitions Checklist in planning and implementing activities with children. It is our mission to help all our students develop to their full potential as well as prepare them for the big step of Kindergarten when they leave our program.

Infant Program

In the Infant Program, each child is nurtured as a unique individual, encouraged to explore in a beautiful, safe, and orderly space with materials carefully chosen for their educational purpose and sensory qualities. A critical opportunity for development, these first years of life are an extraordinary period of cognitive and emotional growth, brain development, and language acquisition. Our infant teachers form close bonds with the children, nurturing language and body awareness development through freedom of movement and exploration. Under their care, the children establish a strong sense of security and autonomy, laying a foundation for lifelong learning.

From birth, babies are marvelous learners, immediately investigating the sights, sounds, and feel of the world. In our classrooms, each child develops a sense of being a separate, independent self, which comes from being treated as an important individual.

Our curriculum provides infants with a safe, rich world full of opportunities for active exploration and enjoyment through hearing, feeling, touching, and moving. Their world is filled with responsive interactions and language: many conversations with others, books (for even the youngest babies), songs, and lots of listening and responding to their vocalizations.

Our program is designed for comprehensive individual development at the child's natural pace. Caring and learning are inseparable. Primary caregivers provide "on demand" care in an environment that maximizes mobility. A baby who feels safe also feels free to grow, move, and explore the surroundings. This provides an optimal opportunity to engage emerging physical, sensorial, perceptual, cognitive, and social skills.

Waddler Program

For a lot of children, this will be their first experience away from home so we want to make it as positive and encouraging as possible. Our goal is to create a love of learning and community in each child as they are reassured of God's unconditional love for them! This program is designed to help children develop social, motor, and language skills, as well as an awareness of the world around them. Children will be exposed to dance, art, music, reading, and chapel experiences so that they can absorb as much of this new learning environment as possible. The teachers will instruct the children in small learning groups and will observe the children throughout the day to track their readiness for new learning opportunities. Children will be exposed to themes like seasons, colors, shapes, and feelings to help them learn in a creative, supportive environment. *Children do not need to be toilet trained for this classroom.*

Toddler Program

Two year olds are beginning to gain a little more independence and are ready for a little more structure in their day. We will continue to work on language skills, gross motor, and fine motor skills, but will begin to put more emphasis on being a part of community and how our own actions can affect others. They will be encouraged to explore their environment and have many opportunities to learn through hands on play-based activities. Children will go to chapel weekly and will learn that God loves them unconditionally. *Children do not need to be toilet trained for this classroom.*

Pre-Children's House & Children's House

These classrooms not only nurture creative learners but will also help children develop independence and an ability to focus for more than a few minutes. We will encourage children to initiate deeper learning by providing an ordered environment for creativity and curiosity. The materials for the classroom have been specifically chosen to help students explore new things with all five senses. Our program and classroom tools will be specially designed to help children fully embrace these special periods of cognitive, social, and spiritual growth. One of our main goals in this program is to build the self-esteem of the child by helping them understand their unique gifts and the unique way they were created by God.

These students continue to learn that it is fun to learn outside of the home and to be part of a larger community. They will also work on:

- Letter/sound identification
- Beginning writing skills
- Number recognition
- Basic counting skills
- Colors and shapes
- Beginning science and social studies concepts

All four year olds will be assessed in accordance with the Virginia Foundation Blocks for Early Learning and The Virginia Beach Kindergarten Transitions Checklist to ensure they are properly prepared for a Kindergarten curriculum.

Students in our Pre-Children's House Class do not need to be toilet trained, but must be in the process of training. In order to be transitioned into Children's House Program toilet training must be complete.

Children's Chapel/Daily Prayer

We hold a weekly children's chapel for our all of our classrooms. This will allow each child the opportunity to praise God, learn about being a part of a community of worshippers, and become aware of God's presence in their daily life. There will also be many opportunities for prayer throughout the school day, i.e.; before snack, at the beginning and end of each day, etc. We want the children to really become aware that God is always there to listen to and guide them.

Program Guidelines

Arrival

Arrival is the most important part of the child's day. It is the transition time between home and school. Our Pre-Children's House and Children's House classrooms begin their school day at 9:00, so we ask that your child arrive by 9:00 if they are enrolled in the Pre-Children's House and Children's House Programs. It is sometimes difficult for a child to enter a class already in full swing. The more prompt you are, the more able the teacher will be to step in with a helping hand or loving hug to make that transition go smoothly.

Please do not use drop off time to engage the teacher in any major conversation as the teacher needs to be focused on the children as they enter the classroom. If you have a concern you need to talk about please feel free to see the director or schedule a conference time with the teacher.

All students must be signed in and out daily by the parent/guardian. We ask that parents notify the school if their child is going to be absent from the program that day.

Departure

One of the key components to a child's successful separating from his/her parent is the certainty that parents always return. You should always have the school's contact information on hand and in the event of an emergency that may cause you to be delayed we ask that you contact the school to insure the message is delivered to the appropriate staff member.

The safety of the child will always be foremost when releasing children to authorized persons.

Please let us know if there are any special circumstances with custody arrangements. We will not be able to prevent the release of a child to his or her custodial parent as listed on the registration form, without having a court document on file. A child will only be released to those persons listed on the child's authorized pick up list. Anyone not on the authorized pick-up list will need prior **written permission** from a parent or legal guardian to pick up a student. A phone call or email does not meet this requirement. A picture ID may be required to verify the authorized person picking up a student. No one under the age of 16 will be allowed to pick up a student.

In the event of late pick up, a late fee of \$5 per minute will be charged for every minute past the pick-up time when a child(ren) has not been picked up. Your child(ren) will not be able to return to the program if the late fee is not paid within two business days.

School Supplies

Each student will need a bag or backpack labeled clearly with their first and last name. A school supply list will be sent home for each classroom. Please make every effort to purchase all needed supplies by your child's first day of school. This will help your child and their teacher be prepared for their day of learning together. Throughout the school year we may ask for donations of supplies as needed. Your donations will help us to keep our costs down.

Infant and Waddler Items

Our very young children need at least three changes of clothing daily. Be sure you provide enough clothing so your child will always be clean and dry. Please label everything with your child's first and last name.

You will also need to ensure that your child has enough diapers and/or underwear for each day. We will be able to store these items for you. In order for us to apply diapering creams, ointments, or teething gels, we need your written authorization. You may get the appropriate forms from the office. Baby powder is not allowed at the Center.

Bottles

For health and safety reasons, bottles are only allowed to be used in the infant classroom. Parents must supply us with one bottle for each required feeding during their child's time here, generally that is around 4-5 bottles each day. Children using bottles must be seated or held. They cannot walk around holding their bottles. Glass bottles are not allowed at the Center. Please make sure your child's name is on each bottle you send. Bottles will be sent home nightly for cleaning.

"Sippy Cups" or Water Bottle

Children in our Waddler, Toddler, Pre-Children's House and Children's House classrooms should bring a "sippy" cup or water bottle for their child(ren) to use each day. These will be sent home each day for proper cleaning. Label all "sippy" cups and water bottles with your child's first and last name.

Pacifiers

Pacifiers are used in the infant classrooms and may be used on a limited basis in the Waddler and Toddler classrooms. We do not allow the use of pacifier clips as they are a strangulation hazard, please remove all clips from your infant or waddler at drop off. All pacifiers must be labeled with your child's name.

Clothing

Our school provides a wide range of active and sensory experiences and often children will be using messy materials. Children should arrive each day dressed comfortably, in clothes that are easily washable and appropriate for the weather. As a reminder, we do not allow any shoes that are not completely closed-in, such as sandals, jellies, etc. Closed-in footwear such as tennis shoes is required for all activities.

All children must have a complete set of clothes (socks included) at school at all times. Please put these clothes inside a plastic bag in your child's school bag. Please make sure to label the clothing and the bag. It will be your responsibility to check your child's extra clothing daily, take out any soiled clothing and replace with new set as needed. Please remember to change your child's extra clothing with each change of season. If your child has an accident and there is not a change of clothes we will have to call you and have a set brought in within in the hour.

Please make sure to send your child in clothing that they can be mostly independent in taking on and off. We have found that belts, overalls, jumpsuits, etcetera, are often difficult for young children. Clothing they can get in and out of easily is most suitable for school. Elastic waists and pullover shirts work great!

Outdoors is used as an extension of the classroom, so your child should come dressed appropriately for all types of weather. Warm jackets, hats, and mittens are needed for cold days. Sunhats, shorts, and cool shirts are appropriated for hot days.

Please remember to LABEL every item with your child's first and last name. We cannot be responsible for lost or damaged clothing.

Items from home

Some children like to bring something from home to school to help them feel more secure in a new environment. If your child would like to share something from home, here are our policies:

- Items such as toys, stuffed animals, money, etc. should **stay at home** (do not put them inside the tote bag).
- Acceptable items include family photos, postcards, things found in nature, educational books or magazines, or items related to our studies.
- Each teacher will develop a show and tell procedure of their own and will communicate this with the parents.
- **We do not allow children to bring toy weapons or electronics (tablets, leap pad, cell phones, etc.) to school.**

Rest Time Supplies

Infants must bring a crib sheet for each day they attend the program. This sheet must fit the mattress snugly so please do not send in a twin size sheet as they do not fit our mattress snugly. Sheets will be sent home daily for cleaning. We do not use blankets in our cribs, so we recommend each infant bring a sleep sack.

Students in our Waddler and Toddler programs who are staying for full days must bring a foldable nap mat, small sheet, and a small blanket for rest time (we store everything in Jumbo Sized Ziplock baggies, so no sleeping sacks please). Students in our Pre-Children's House and Children's House

Classrooms staying for full days must bring a small blanket for rest time. We will supply a cot and cot sheet for our older classrooms. If a child wishes to bring a pillow it must be a small travel size pillow and it must be covered with a pillow case. They may also bring a small stuffed animal if it helps them to rest. All rest items must be able to fit inside the Ziploc baggie. All sheets, blankets, and pillows will be sent home each Friday for washing or more often as needed.

Diapers

Students in our Infant through Pre-Children's House programs who are not yet potty trained will need to bring in diapers and wipes for each day. When your child's supply gets low the teacher will let you know so the supply can be replenished.

Toilet Training

Learning to use the toilet should be a positive experience for children. Problems in toilet learning arise when adults do not pay attention to the child's level of readiness. The child will let you know when s/he is ready to give up the diaper. Some easily recognizable signs of readiness include the child's waking up with a dry diaper in the mornings and naptimes, talking about the bathroom and "what goes on in there", and removing his/her own diaper. Pressuring the child leads to weeks of unsuccessful experiences during which the child is blamed for failing.

Timing for toilet learning is as individual as learning to walk. There is no right age by which all children should be toilet learned. When a child is physically and cognitively ready to use the toilet, "training" should take a short period of time. When you feel your child is ready we will try toilet learning your child for ten (10) days. If your child does not show interest, has too many fears, or too many accidents, we will stop until we feel the child is ready to start again. We ask you to begin the potty training process at home for at least two days before starting with us, so for example you could do it on a Saturday and Sunday and we can then begin with it on Monday at school. We ask that you communicate with the teachers any special language you are using for potty time. It would also be helpful to let the staff know if there are any sign's your child gives before going to the bathroom. Does s/he grab himself, what words do they use, etc... Anything that would be helpful.

Once toilet learning starts, it is essential that you continually encourage your child at home. Here are a few hints in dealing with toilet learning that not only help us, but also will limit some frustration for your child.

1. Your child needs to wear loose fitting clothing (easy for them to pull up and down). Avoid belts, buckles, buttons, overalls, or t-shirts with snaps between the legs.
2. Determine from the beginning if he is going to sit or stand.
3. Supply the center with at least five (5) complete sets of extra clothing. Please include socks and shoes, and make sure all clothing is labeled with your child's name.
4. Continue positive reinforcement at home.
5. Pull-ups are confusing to a child. Use cotton-training pants or thick training pants.
6. Expect accidents but do not become angry. Resist the temptation to punish or scold your child for this appropriate behavior.

Cleanliness in the bathroom is an essential component of toilet learning. Even though your child no longer needs diapers, s/he may still need help with his/her toileting needs. We will gladly assist your child as s/he learns how to master the associated hygiene skills. Teachers station themselves

in the bathrooms to supervise and provide any necessary help. Continue to provide baby wipes so we can maintain your child's cleanliness.

Birthdays

Birthdays are very important to a child, and we would like to share those special days. We ask that if you will be providing a treat for your child's birthday that you speak with teacher first to discuss what is appropriate to bring, that the treats be store bought, and small (mini cupcakes instead of the big ones). Save the big treats for your at home party please. Please do not bring party favors or other party decorations! Instead, you may want to consider donating a book, CD, or puzzle as a gift to the class. We encourage the child to feel good about "giving" as well as "receiving" presents.

If you will be planning a birthday party for your child, we ask that you send invitations through the mail, rather than through the classroom, unless you will be inviting the entire class. Children can be easily hurt if not invited to a party.

Parent Communication

Communication between school and home is very important as we are partners in helping your child grow and develop. We want to make sure you know what is happening during your child's day so that you can talk with them about it in the evenings. We would also love to know happenings at home so we can be better prepared to care for your child during the day.

To help you know what is happening each day, all parents will receive updates via the Brightwheel app. Messages, photos, and important updates will be sent on Brightwheel.

Informal communication between parent and teacher/directors through Brightwheel app, notes, email, or telephone calls are highly recommended. There will be two parent/teacher conferences opportunities. Parents will be notified of the dates as time approaches. Special conferences can be arranged upon request.

The following are some suggestions of ways you can help facilitate communication:

- Please read carefully the messages, newsletters, and emails that come home.
- If you have a concern about your child's development, please ask for a conference. Teachers are happy to discuss your child's growth and progress.
- Please complete any program evaluations that are sent home during the year, so we can better meet your family's needs.
- Please do not talk about your child in front of him/her. Children can be sensitive about being discussed as if they were not there.

Information about our school can also be found on our website – www.gatheringpreschool.org or on our Facebook page.

Behavior Guidelines

It is our goal to promote each child's physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual well-being and growth. Staff will interact with children and each other to provide help, comfort, and support to each other while at all times being conscious of the following:

- Respect for personal privacy
- Respect for cultural, ethnic, and family backgrounds

- Encouraging decision-making abilities
- Promoting ways of getting along
- Encouraging independence and self-direction
- Consistency in applying expectations

There are three basic ground rules for our programs:

1. Respect for yourself
2. Respect for others
3. Respect for the environment

Behavioral guidance will be constructive in nature, age and stage appropriate, and is intended to redirect children toward appropriate behavior and to resolve conflicts. If a child needs some quiet time to regain control, he/she will be directed to a quiet space, which is always within sight and sound of a teacher. Children will, on an age appropriate level, be led toward an understanding of actions and consequences, and will be learning to choose appropriate behaviors. We will not at any time use physical punishment or use verbally abusive remarks such as belittling or threats.

Young children are still learning about behavior expectations and the effects of their behavior on others. On occasion, a child may physically hurt another person. When this occurs, the child is given a few moments, if needed, to calm down and collect him or herself. Staff will work closely with the child in helping him or her identify the problem (what happened that was wrong), the outcome (physical hurt), and how the child may be able to “fix the problem” (ask if the other person is okay, offer care, etc.). In these instances, parents will be notified with an incident report. If a child continues to struggle with these behaviors, staff and parents will meet to create a plan to help the child become more successful. In the unlikely event that these behaviors continue, the child may be dis-enrolled at the Executive Director’s discretion.

Biting Policy

We recognize that biting is, unfortunately, not unexpected when infants and waddlers are in group care. We are always upset when children are bitten in our program, and we recognize how upsetting it is for parents. While we feel that biting is never the right thing for children to do, we know that they bite for a variety of reasons. Most of these reasons are not related to behavior problems.

The Gathering Academic Preschool does not focus on punishment for the biting, but on effective techniques that address the specific reasons for the biting. When biting occurs, we have three main responses:

1. Care for and help the child who was bitten.
2. Help the child who bit learn other behavior.
3. Work with the child & parents who bit and examine our program to stop biting.

We give immediate attention and first aid as needed to children who are bitten. We offer to put ice on the bite if the child is willing. If the skin is broken, we clean the wound with soap and water. If children are bitten on the top of the hands or fingers **and** the skin is broken, we recommend that they be seen by their health care provider; this is due to a higher probability of infection.

When children bite, their parents are informed personally and privately the same day and given a copy of our incident report form. When children are bitten, their parents are informed personally and privately that day and given a copy of our accident report form.

Our teachers express strong disapproval of biting. They work to keep children safe and to help the child who bit learn different, more appropriate behavior. When there are episodes of ongoing biting, we develop a plan of specific strategies, techniques, and timelines to address it. We do not and will not use any response that harms a child or is known to be ineffective. If the child continues to bite despite our interventions, s/he may be dis-enrolled from the program until the biting is under control.

Training sessions and workshops on biting are given during the year as needed for teachers. In addition, we have current resources on biting available to the parents and teachers. We encourage parents to bring their concerns and frustrations directly to the teachers. The administration is kept informed of the problems and will work with the parents and teachers to help bring the biting under control. Communication is very important in order to help children learn not to bite!

Outdoor Time

Outdoor play is a critical part of young children's experiences and aids in all aspects of development. Teachers plan fun, active, and engaging activities for outside play. We ask families to ensure that children are dressed appropriately for outside play each day. This means dressing with coats, hats, and gloves when it is cold and light clothing when it is hot. Shoes that cover the feet completely are required at all times, such as tennis shoes or boots. Unfortunately, we cannot allow sandals, crocs, or any other footwear that does not adequately protect the feet. Our children are very active, and we want to protect them from trips, falls, or other injury.

We pay close attention to weather and air quality when making decisions regarding outdoor activities. We will reduce or eliminate strenuous outdoor activities due to extreme heat and poor air quality; however, we may go outside for short periods of time doing non-strenuous activities. Teachers monitor the Heat Index to determine if it is safe to go outside. We will also reduce or eliminate outdoor time due to extreme cold.

Open Invitation

Parents and guardians are always welcome at our school. We encourage you to come and observe our programs, but remember to address any questions about our activities to the staff rather than the students. In order to maintain a smooth transition from student to parent we do request you limit your observations to 30 minutes.

Your participation in our programs is encouraged and welcomed in many ways, i.e., for special holiday celebrations, for end of the year events, or you can join us for chapel time. Each teacher will ask for parent volunteers as they need them, but if you have a special talent (cooking, sewing, gardening, singing, etc.) that you would like to share with the group please let the teacher know. We look forward to working with you throughout the year.

Illness, Injury, and Allergies

Illness

For the protection of all our students and staff do not bring your child(ren) if they are sick. Students who have had a temperature of 100 degrees or more must be **fever free without the aid of medication** for 24 hours before returning to school.

- Please do not bring your child to the program if he/she has any of the following symptoms:
 - A constant cough, wheezing, excessive nasal discharge, sneezing, vomiting or diarrhea.

- Any undiagnosed rash
- Sore or discharging eyes, ears, or throat
- Any contagious childhood ailments such as strep throat, pink eye, ring worm, impetigo, etc.

A doctor's note may be required before your child can return to the program.

A student who becomes ill while in the program will be separated from the other students but will remain within supervision of the staff. A parent will be notified and required to pick up their child within 30 minutes of notification.

When students in any of our programs have been exposed to a communicable disease listed in the Department of Health's current communicable disease chart, the parents will be notified in writing within 24 hours or the next business day of the program being informed, unless forbidden by law, except for life threatening diseases which must be reported to parents immediately.

Notification of Child's Illness

It is the responsibility of the parent to notify the program when their child will be absent due to illness. This is especially important when the child is ill with a communicable disease listed in the Department of Health's current communicable disease chart. This chart can be found on the VDH website:

http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/3/2016/03/Communicable_Disease_Chart-1.pdf

Injury

If your child is injured, basic first aid will be administered. If deemed necessary, a parent or guardian may be contacted. In cases of emergency, 911 will be called, and the parent/guardian notified.

The school has insurance coverage for accidents that happen on the school premises that require medical treatment.

Allergies

If your child suffers from allergies of any kind: food, dairy, peanuts, bee stings, etc., this information must be listed in the appropriate section of the emergency form. .

If, after entry into the school, the child develops any allergies it is the responsibility of the parent to immediately inform the school both verbally and in writing.

Health and Safety Procedures

Sunscreen, Insect Repellent, Lip Balm and Diaper Cream/Ointment

The school will apply sunscreen, insect repellent or lip balm to students with written parent permission. The parent must provide the sunscreen, repellent or lip balm. We can only apply according to the package directions so please make sure to purchase one appropriate for your child's age. We will only apply sunscreen in the afternoons if we will be outside more than 15 minutes. Parents should apply sunscreen prior to the child arriving at school if they want the sunscreen on for morning outside playtime.

If your child needs diaper cream/ointment please fill out the appropriate administration forms and be prepared to leave the cream here labeled with your child's name. We cannot apply expired lotions

or homemade lotions. If your child is experiencing extreme discomfort or has open sores on their diaper area, you will be notified to pick up your child and get them seen by a physician to diagnose and provide us with a treatment plan.

Medication

It is the school's policy to administer prescription and non-prescription medications when needed to children in our care. In order to administer medication the following must be done:

- A **Request for Administration of Medication Form** must be completed and submitted to the school for processing and approval prior to any medication being allowed to remain at the school. The school office is open each day from 8:00-4:30.
- One form must be completed for each medication. Multiple medications cannot be listed on one form.
- We must follow the package/prescription directions unless we have authorization from the child's physician to do otherwise.
- Request for Administration of prescription medications will expire in 10 days unless signed by a physician in which case they are good for up to one year.
- Request for Administration of over the counter medications will expire in one year from date signed.
- Any change in prescription requires a new written order from the prescribing physician.
- A parent will be required to drop off and pick up the medication from the program staff. Students are **NOT** allowed to transport medication to or from school, nor may it be kept with the student.
- All prescription medications should be in the original container with the prescription label intact, state the name of the child and the dosage instructions in full.
- All non-prescription medications must be in their original packaging.
- All medications must be accompanied by the correct means for administration (measuring cup, syringe, etc).
- Please check the expiration on all medications. We will not accept expired medications.
- All medication is kept under lock and key.
- Program staff trained in medication administration will oversee the prescription medication process.
- Any unusual side effects will be reported immediately to the parent and Executive Director.
- Any changes in the medication, dosage, time to be administered, etc., will require an updated **Request for Administration of Medication Form** to be submitted.
- Medications must be picked up within 7 days of expiration of Medication Form or will be disposed of by the school.

Emergency Operations Plan

An emergency plan has been developed to help our staff and students be prepared for emergency situations. Should there be an emergency, we want you to be informed of our plan. Important components include:

- Emergency actions to be taken may include evacuation, internal lockdown, external lockdown, or shelter-in-place.
- Program staff will receive emergency operations training during orientation and then annual training with all updated information.
- Program staff will complete monthly fire drills, bi-annual shelter-in-place drills, and annual lockdown drills. More drills will be done as needed.

- Parents should keep their child's emergency contact information up to date.

Inclement Weather Closures

Our programs may be forced to close or delay opening due to severe weather conditions. The Gathering Academic Preschool will follow Virginia Beach Public Schools for weather related closings. At times, if appropriate, we may open before the public schools reopen. If any weather conditions cause the preschool to close during open business hours, the parents will be notified to pick up their child(ren) within the hour. **Make sure the office has your information for emergency procedures!** The Gathering Academic Preschool does not make up inclement weather days. All school closings and openings will be communicated via email and the Brightwheel app.

Health Related Closures

In the event of a health related situation our school will remain open unless the following happens: 1) the Center for Disease Control or the Virginia Department of Public Health recommends that we close; 2) a student, a staff member, or a family member of either receives a confirmed diagnosis of the illness and the Preschool Advisory Board votes for closure for a TBD amount of time; or 3) the governing body of the church votes to close the church - effectively closing the school - for a TBD amount of time. As per our financial policies, tuition would still be due during the closing. Please see our financial policy for more information.

Food Programs

Waddlers, Toddlers, Pre-Children's House and Children's House programs will have a designated time for students to eat their snacks and/or lunch. Infants will be fed on demand.

Parents must provide snacks and lunches. Insulated lunch bags are required for all students and must be labeled with your child's name. Refrigeration and/or heating **are not available for food and drink**, except in our infant classroom where we will refrigerate food and warm bottles as needed in a bottle warmer. Please provide everything your child needs for lunch. This includes the bottles, as many as our needed for the day, napkins, utensils, and cup if needed. All items will be sent home each night for proper cleaning.

As a part of our curriculum we will be working on healthy choices for kids, so please make sure that snacks and lunches include nutritious food and drink. Appropriate snacks would be a piece of fruit and some crackers such as goldfish or ritz crackers, a small yogurt, cheese stick, pretzels, etc. Please do not send in chips or cookies for snack. It is our policy to only serve water or milk for snacks and meals. We ask that you save the juice for at home.

We are unable to serve any food that is considered a choking hazard. We will not serve hotdogs/corndogs or nuts in our school. Other foods that are considered choking hazards are whole grapes (must be cut in half), big carrot sticks (carrot shreds or petite carrot sticks are ok), popcorn, etc. It is at the discretion of the director or in the director's absence the lead teacher in the classroom as to whether a food is a choking hazard.

Enrollment Procedures

In order to enroll your child at The Gathering Academic Preschool the following must be done:

- Complete and return the following forms:
 - Registration Form
 - Emergency Form
 - Immunization record

- **Original** birth certificate, hospital record of birth, or passport must be shown to the director
- Read and sign Medication Authorization Policy
- Tuition Agreement
- Other forms as required per the Director
- All paper work must be submitted to the office prior to your child's first day of attendance.

Each August families will be required to complete a new registration form, emergency form, and tuition agreement. New immunizations will be required every 6 months for students under 2 years of age.

Withdrawal or Termination

Withdrawal Procedures

- Two weeks written notice is required prior to withdrawing your child from any of the programs.
- On this withdrawal notice please include the reason for withdrawal, and final day of attendance.
- Your account will be charged for the two weeks from the day we receive written notice, whether your child attends or not.
- If you decide to withdraw your child for the summer months but wish to return in the Fall, we will require that you pay the registration fee prior to leaving for the summer and pay ½ of the monthly tuition due for the months of July and August.

Termination of Enrollment

- If a child's unresolved behavior issue has not been resolved after attempting a cooperative solution in communication with the parents, then the program reserves the right to terminate a child's enrollment.
- The final decision on termination will be the responsibility of the Executive Director (see discipline for more information regarding student behavior).
- See the Financial Policies section for more information on termination of enrollment due to non-payment of an account.

Financial Policies

- Tuition is based on the annual school year calendar. It is divided into 12 equal monthly payments for your convenience. Therefore there is no tuition reduction for school vacations, teacher in-service/training days, inclement weather days, health related closures, holidays or days absent.
- Tuition is due on the 25th of each month for the following month (i.e. Sept. tuition due Aug. 25)
- A late fee of \$20 will be assessed if payment is not received by close of business on the 30th of the month. If tuition and late payment fee are not paid by the 5th of each month your child will not be accepted back into the program until payment is made. Persistent tardiness in paying tuition may result in escalation of late fee charge or could result in termination from the program. If payment arrangements need to be made please contact the Executive Director immediately.
- There will be a \$25 fee for all returned checks. After 2 returned checks during one school year, we will no longer accept checks for payment.
- Financial assistance in the form of tuition reduction may be available. Please see Executive Director for more information.

- Payments may be made online via Brightwheel app or may be paid in the form of cash or check. Payments may be completed online or dropped off in the mailbox located by the preschool office door.
- Checks should be made payable to The Gathering Academic Preschool or The GAP and have your child's name written in the memo section of the check.
- **Please do NOT hand payment to classroom teachers or put in your child's bag or lunch box, we cannot guarantee it will be received. Place your payment in the payment box located by the Director's office door.**

Annual Registration Fee

- There is a registration fee of \$100 per child due at the time of enrollment from June through January of each year. From January to June the registration fee will drop to \$50 per child.
- The registration fee is an annual fee which will be due by March 15 in order to hold your child's spot for the following school year.

Confidentiality and Children's Records

Information contained in your child's records, including your personal information, is privileged and confidential. Anyone who is not directly involved in the care of your child or affiliated with Virginia's Department of Social Services will not have access to the records without your written authorization or a court order. Parents and guardians may have access to their child's records at reasonable times upon request. Upon withdrawal of your child from the school, records will be retained for at least three years as required by The Department of Social Services.

Prayer Needs

As a Christian School we will hold daily prayer with the children. If you have any prayer concerns you would like us to keep in mind, you may speak directly with the director of the school or write out your prayer request and drop it in the school drop box. We would be happy to pray for you. Please know that all concerns are kept confidential by our staff.