



# The Acorn School

AT VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY







The Acorn School admits children through rolling enrollment twelve months per year as age match (child's date of birth) spots become identified and made available.

VU families are allowed one right of refusal when offered a spot in The Acorn School before being moved to the end of the wait list.

*The majority of spots will become available for an August 5, 2024 start date. Families will be informed of an age-eligible spot for this start date and per ongoing availability on or after May 2024.*

**To secure the offered spot please complete the steps:**

- One parent/guardian must attend a mandatory orientation
- To commit to the spot, parent/guardian emails Linda Wilson, Administrative Officer (*failure to submit this within two business days after orientation results in forfeit of spot*)
- *If you would like to schedule an optional tour, please contact Linda Wilson [linda.l.wilson@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:linda.l.wilson@vanderbilt.edu)*
- Parent/guardian must submit a completed enrollment packet at least five business days prior to the child's first day of school

***The New School Year begins Monday, August 5, 2024 and ends Friday, July 25, 2025***



The Acorn School at Vanderbilt University provides a Whole Child (mind, body, spirit) approach to early childhood care and education.

Inspired by social-constructivist systems thinking theories, educators know that children's conceptual understandings emerge through their engagement with the world.

The program is PLAY-based with an Emergent Curriculum.





Online payment of tuition is required through the Brightwheel app. This is paid automatically on the first of each month.

Program hours: Monday through Friday from 7:30 AM – 5:30 PM

The New School Year begins August 5, 2024 and ends July 25, 2025.

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

*Labor Day\**  
*Thanksgiving and the day after Thanksgiving*  
*Vanderbilt University Winter Break*  
*New Year's Day*  
*Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day*  
*Memorial Day*  
*Juneteenth*  
*Independence Day*

Additional dates of closure for teacher in-service:  
Monday, *July 29 – Friday, Aug 2, 2024; Friday, March 7, 2025.*

The Acorn School will close on *any additional Chancellor holidays if and as these are announced.*

*There is no tuition proration for dates of closure or child absences (including due to illness or vacation.)*



# Parent Partnership

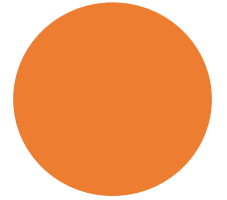
The Acorn School recognizes the pivotal role parents play in their child's education, honoring the parent as the child's first teacher.

Through consistent verbal and written communication, parents and early childhood educators strengthen their relationship to support a shared understanding of the child.

- Brightwheel
- Teacher Meet and Greet
- Back to School Night
- Bi-annual conferences
- Week of the Young Child.

Families may choose to engage with projects within the school. One example is our Parent CONNECT Group that designs Teacher Appreciation activities throughout the school year.

Parent and teacher foundational relationships contribute to a positive school climate.





# New Classroom Transition

Adults anticipate big emotions as part of the child's natural transition process as little learners grow to trust new teachers and adapt to new routines and schedules.

Parents are reminded that many young children are transitioning from an experience of being the only child in the home to being one of eight or more children in the classroom.

Depending on the individual child's unique temperament, it is developmentally appropriate for them to take 3-12 weeks to acclimate to a new classroom community. The Acorn School partners with families as they navigate their child's adjustment period.







## Morning Drop-Off Transition

Children are required to be signed into school no later than 10:00 AM (an exception will be made for pediatric appointments, but please call ahead.)

Parents must sign-in on the Brightwheel app and check-in verbally and visually with the teacher at both Drop-off and Pick-up times.

Parents are encouraged to create a strong and consistent drop off routine that supports the child's transition into the classroom each day.



# Well Child

The Acorn School is licensed as a Well Child program.

To attend, children must be able to engage in the daily rhythm of the Acorn School program within the established classroom group size and teacher ratio.

Parents assess their child's health and wellness before arriving at the childcare center. The child must be alert and have a temperature at or below 100 degrees without the assistance of medication.

If teachers identify that the child exhibits symptoms (e.g., diarrhea, fever, unexplained rash, vomiting) indicating they are not well enough to attend school the parent will be contacted and the child must be picked up to go home within the hour. These strategies are in place in an effort to protect the health and safety of all children enrolled in the program. These policies are defined in the Acorn Family Handbook.





# Social Emotional Development

All children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, and responsive interactions. (Webster-Stratton, 1999)

The Acorn School care practice strives to be nurturing and respectful, and to reflect the high priority VCFC places on the value for both the individual and the community.

The Acorn School uses the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tools (TPITOS™ and TPOT™) developed by Vanderbilt researchers to reinforce high-quality practices that support children's social-emotional development and behavior.





The American Academy of Pediatrics strongly emphasizes the importance of play for children and provides a useful definition of something that seems intuitive but difficult to describe: *“Play often creates an imaginative private reality, contains elements of make believe, and is nonliteral. ‘Play is engaging and social, helping children learn new skills as well as how to get along with others and manage their own desires and emotions. Play can take place in any location, and outdoor play is a particularly important context.”* (Bravender, 2020)





# Infant Program

Through primary routines for nutrition, diapering, and sleep, children ages six weeks through twelve months of age forge with their teachers a nurturing, respectful bond that empowers the child's growth, learning, and development.

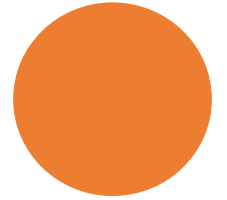
Adults have influence over and responsibility for children's developing self-concept by the way they engage with, speak to, and respond to children.

Parents provide 100% of nutrition, bottles and food, through the child's first birthday.





The Acorn School teaching practice reflects the research-based understanding that play is essential to children's health and well-being, and foundational to children's construction of knowledge. The design of the learning environment privileges long periods of uninterrupted time for children to play indoors and outside.





# Toddlers and Twos

Young learners newly excited to explore the world with all five senses grow, learn, and develop. With gentle coaching from nurturing teachers, children learn to manage their big feelings and engage successfully with peers.

All humans want to feel respect and self-worth and a sense of belonging, this develops for children when they are supported with caring adults, primary routines, classroom activities, and the design of the learning environment.

Children begin to recognize that they have control over their bodies as they develop a verbal expression and mastery through milestones such as toilet training.







The Acorn School emergent curriculum requires teachers to hold an image of the child as someone capable and competent and actively seeking knowledge.

The learning environment is designed by teachers and reflects their observation of the play schemas of children, demonstrating that activities responsive to children's interests provide meaningful learning opportunities.



# Preschool Program

Through risk and rigor, The Acorn School design provides a learning environment where children have consistent opportunities with peers for collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking.

By perceiving children as curious, competent and capable of self-control, and honoring their interests and needs, teachers will enable children to explore their big ideas, solve problems, and respond to others with kindness and empathy.

Children are often in the Acorn preschool program for multiple years through PreK - the year before Kindergarten.

K-Camp is a transformative nature education summer program in the month of July for PreK children entering elementary school in August providing rising kindergartners an opportunity to confront change through the joyful adventure of exploring the buildings and grounds of Vanderbilt University.





# Play in Nature

Through play in the varied and less structured venues of outdoor spaces, children encounter diverse opportunities for decision making that stimulate problem solving and creativity. These types of activities promote executive functioning and may lead to increased future academic performance, concentration, and other markers of cognitive functioning. (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005, Charles, 2009, Charles, 2016, Strife & Downey, 2009)



Opportunities for creative use of loose parts and child-led investigation set the groundwork for cognitive processes and support scientific and aesthetic thinking. (Ernst, 2008)

Licensing requires outside play every day the temperature registers between 32 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Acorn School asks parents to dress children in washable play clothes with appropriate weather layers and to apply sunscreen at home before arriving to school – teachers will reapply at noon and as needed. Insect repellent is not required.





**Risky play** involves kids experimenting and pushing themselves to figure out what will happen, without knowing the exact outcome. Risky play in early childhood can help develop a child's self-confidence, resilience, persistence, executive functioning and helps them to develop risk management skills.

*“When we have kids engage in play, it’s really a fundamental way for them to figure out the world — how the world works, how their body works,”* says Mariana Brussoni, professor at the University of BC Children’s Hospital and featured researcher in The Nature of Things documentary The Power of Play.

*“Risky Play for children,”* she explains, is *“thrilling and exciting play where children engage in risk without certainty,”* Her work in injury prevention research shows that engaging in risky play can actually reduce the risk of injury.



# Collegial Partnerships

The Acorn School values lifelong learning and adult education. The Acorn School serves as a site for teacher observation and training for Nashville State Community College and other institutions.

Through an established partnership with the Peabody School of Education and Human Development, The Acorn School provides research opportunities that may inform individual child well-being and best practice in the field of early childhood education.

VCFC is proud to partner with the Next Steps at Vanderbilt University program to provide career development training through an ECE apprenticeship recognized by the US Department of Labor.

