



The Nest Nursery School

FAMILY HANDBOOK

2026 - 2027

Dearest Families,

Welcome to The Nest Nursery School. We are so grateful to welcome you into our community as members, partners and co-constructors in the journey of your child's early learning.

At The Nest, we are more than a school. We are an ecosystem of relationships among children, educators, families and the place we call home: *Atlanta, Georgia*.

Inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy, we believe it is our mission to nurture each child's curiosity and innate sense of wonder. We also believe families are essential contributors to that work. Children thrive when the adults around them are connected and supported.

In a world where modern life can fray our connections and caregiving can feel isolating, we imagine something different: a community rooted in belonging. We believe in reclaiming the village. We believe in the power of third spaces, those important places outside of work and home where connection can grow. At The Nest, we strive to be that kind of place.

A place where you are not simply dropping off your child, but stepping into a community that supports you. A place where parenthood is not a private burden, but a shared endeavor.

This year is especially meaningful for our Nest community. **We are celebrating 15 years of The Nest!** We are also excited to move to Terminal South as we begin this next chapter. Our new home gives us an opportunity to grow while staying connected to what makes The Nest special.

The work of raising children is sacred. It is also collective. We are honored to do this work alongside you.

As you read through this handbook, know that these are not simply policies. They are expressions of our values and the community we are building together. I encourage you to read with both your mind and your heart and to consider how your presence can help shape the community we share.

Thank you for choosing The Nest. Thank you for trusting us with your children. We are so grateful you are here.

We cannot wait to learn with you and begin this exciting new chapter at Terminal South **together**.

With peace,

Melissa Ferguson

Executive Director

The Nest Nursery School

Section 1: About Us

The Nest Nursery School is a Reggio Emilia inspired early learning community located at 1040 Grant Street in Grant Park serving 60 children. We serve children ages 12 weeks through 5 years and are open Monday through Friday with two schedule options:

- School Day: 8:00am-3:30pm
- Full Day: 8:00am-5:30pm

Our program includes four classrooms, an art studio, nature spaces, outdoor play areas, a central piazza and a fully functioning kitchen. Our team includes classroom educators, a chef, administrative and support staff, a Head of Infant & Toddler Pedagogy, Head of Preschool Pedagogy, Studio Teacher and Yoga + Mindfulness teacher.

We love being part of the Grant Park community. We are walking distance from Grant Park, Zoo Atlanta, the The Atlanta BeltLine, with family-friendly neighborhood spots like Patria Cocina nearby. We are proud to be celebrating 15 years of The Nest and are so looking forward to our move to Terminal South in 2027.

Our Mission

The Nest Nursery School is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to nurturing relationships, curiosity, empathy and advocacy. We believe in expanding what is possible in early childhood education and creating a school where every child is seen as an integral member of their community and a valuable citizen. We are dedicated to building an understanding of the inequities in early childhood education and to expanding the possibilities for schools.

Our practice is grounded in the Reggio Emilia philosophy and an image of the child as a competent and curious learner. We use consent-based practices to respect children's autonomy and developing sense of agency. We also follow Conscious Discipline's Brain State Model to support children's emotional development, self-regulation and sense of safety.

We see every family as unique and deserving of respect. Through strong relationships among children, educators and families, we create an environment where children's natural curiosity is nurtured and their love of learning can grow.

Our Vision

The Nest embraces childhood as a time of infinite possibility. We create a home away from home where children feel loved, respected and heard and families feel welcomed and valued. Inspired by The Reggio Emilia Philosophy, we see children as capable learners with many ways of expressing ideas and understanding the world. We believe education is not fixed. We remain open to scientific thinking, research and new perspectives that allow our practice to grow and evolve.

We are collaborators and fluid thinkers. Educators, children and families contribute to the life of the school, and we continually reflect, experiment and adapt based on what we observe and learn. Our environment and curriculum are designed to leave room for possibility. We hold ourselves accountable to Georgia licensing requirements and to the high standards we set for ourselves while remaining willing to question, learn and improve. We support the whole child through nutritious meals, social & emotional well being, daily outdoor experiences, intentional small-group interactions, individualized learning and thoughtfully designed environments. Connection to nature and our surrounding community is an essential part of daily life at The Nest.

We believe strong educators are essential to strong schools. Educators without a degree in Early Childhood Education are fully supported and paid to earn their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential within their first year at The Nest.

Our Beliefs and Values *At The Nest We Believe...*

- Children are born with a natural ability to learn from their surroundings and experiences.
- All children have the right to a safe, loving and nurturing environment in which to grow and explore.
- The full school community has the right to an environment that supports collaboration.
- The educator's job is to support and deepen each child's innate affinity towards learning.
- Open and honest communication and dialogue among educators and families is a cornerstone to positive experiences for children.
- All individuals are unique in their perspective and have the right to share their ideas.
- A high level of responsibility from all to support the school environment is essential.
- Our school creates an organic, dynamic and changing culture that serves its community.
- Our school is connected to a larger community and as such the school has a responsibility to enter into intentional and purposeful exchange with the community.

At The Nest, enduring values guide daily life and long-term thinking. These include...

- **RELATIONSHIPS.** *Relationships are nurtured in a culture of connection, collaboration, and caring.*
- **EXPERIMENTATION.** *Through experimentation, we embrace creativity, inquiry and exploration as essential components of learning and teaching.*
- **EMPATHY.** *Empathy emerges in a culture of openness, curiosity, reflection, perspective-taking, and awareness.*
- **JOY.** *Joy makes living and learning more meaningful and pleasurable.*

Our Story, Our Future

The Nest Nursery School was founded in 2011 by three local mothers and educators who wanted to create a thoughtful early childhood program in Southeast Atlanta. From the beginning, The Nest has challenged conventional models of early education and remained rooted in relationships, curiosity and the Reggio Emilia philosophy.

The Nest began in a small home in Ormewood Park and moved to our current Grant Park location in 2017. Today, we serve up to 55 children across four classrooms and continue to create environments where children can explore, question and learn through many forms of expression.

Our philosophy has been carried forward by educators who have helped shape The Nest over the years. Mandy Palmer, a founder, continues to be part of the school as our Studio Teacher. Kiah Ballard, Head of Infant Pedagogy, has been a steward of our philosophy since 2013. Charletra Johnson, Head of Preschool Pedagogy, recently celebrated her 10-year anniversary with The Nest and brings childlike wonder to every unfolding project.

The past year has also brought a new administrative team. Melissa Fergusson became Executive Director last summer, bringing nearly a decade of administrative experience in Reggio Emilia inspired schools, an art background and a deep personal connection to the work as a mother. Rachel Rouse also joined the administration last summer, leading the extensive paperwork and systems behind our licensing and compliance. Annie LeVasseur became Assistant Director this summer, bringing warmth and a parent's perspective as the mother of a Nest child. She has also introduced our growing practice of yoga and mindfulness into every classroom.

We enmesh nature and the outdoors into daily life at The Nest. Our school chef, Ray Fleming, integrates local produce into thoughtfully curated menus that nourish our children and connect them to the community around them.

After being tasked with relocating, we are elated to begin our next chapter at Terminal South in historic Peoplestown in 2027. Peoplestown has a rich history of activism and advocacy for equality. We hope to honor and steward that legacy as we become part of the neighborhood.

As we celebrate 15 years of The Nest, we are proud of where we have been and excited for where we are headed.

Curriculum & Philosophy

Our curriculum is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach and its image of children as strong and curious members of their community. We believe children have the right to high-quality education and to environments that support their relationships, ideas and growing sense of agency.

Learning at The Nest is play based, emergent, and intentionally responsive. Rather than following a fixed curriculum, educators observe children, document their thinking and use their interests and questions to guide what comes next.

Children are encouraged to experiment, investigate, problem-solve and express their ideas in many ways. The 100 Languages.

We believe the environment is an important part of the learning process. Classrooms are thoughtfully designed with open-ended materials and opportunities for exploration, creativity and collaboration. Small-group experiences allow children to share ideas, listen to one another and build knowledge together.

Educators are researchers alongside children. We continually observe, reflect, document and adapt our environments and practices based on what we learn.

We strive to create a democratic community where children, families and educators are respected as valued contributors and where curiosity, collaboration and mutual care shape daily life.

Professional Development

Ongoing professional development is central to maintaining high-quality early childhood education at The Nest. We invest in our educators through paid Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials, thoughtfully curated professional development days and weeks, and for-credit coursework focused on community building, project work, child development and evolving educational practice.

Our educators participate in required Georgia licensing training and school-based professional development. All educators are certified in CPR and First Aid.

Professional learning is embedded into our weekly practice. Tuesday pedagogy meetings and two hours of weekly planning time bring pedagogy and teaching teams together to reflect, collaborate and plan. Throughout the year, we also engage in week-long deep dives that allow us to closely examine and strengthen our practice.

Our curriculum is aligned with the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS) and these standards are intentionally woven into daily planning and classroom practice. Planning sheets are updated daily and displayed in each classroom so families can see what educators are observing, planning and exploring with their children.

We believe professional development is not separate from our work. It is an ongoing process of learning, questioning, experimenting and growing together as a community.

Section Two: General Policies & Procedures

Admission & Enrollment

The Nest Nursery School operates year-round from August through July and serves children from 12 weeks through 5 years. Our regular school hours are Monday through Friday, with school closings listed on the annual calendar.

The enrollment fee is \$350 per child and is due when a family accepts a space. This non-refundable fee helps support classroom start-up costs.

Because The Nest is a small nonprofit school, our operating costs and educator salaries depend on maintaining full enrollment. To give us adequate time to fill an open space, families are required to provide 30 days' written notice when withdrawing from the school. If 30 days' notice is not provided, an additional month of tuition will be charged in place of the required notice period.

All families must complete and sign the required enrollment and acknowledgment forms and maintain a current account throughout enrollment. Families are also responsible for keeping contact and enrollment information up to date.

Currently enrolled children and their siblings receive first priority for available spaces. The Nest reserves the right to make enrollment and classroom placement decisions based on the needs of individual children and the classroom community.

Non-Discrimination

The Nest Nursery School welcomes every child and family. We provide equal educational opportunities without discrimination based on race, color, creed, national origin, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, political beliefs, marital status, sexual orientation, special needs or any other status protected by federal, state or local law. Our programs are designed to meet the individual needs of the children in our care and to support every child's ability to participate and thrive.

Inclusion

We believe every child and family deserves to feel welcomed, respected and that they belong. The Nest is open and affirming to all genders, identities and family structures. We are an anti-bias early childhood program committed to recognizing and addressing bias while helping children develop empathy, fairness and respect for themselves and others.

The Nest makes reasonable accommodations to support the full and active participation of every child based on their individual strengths, capabilities and needs. We strive to create a community where every child and family feels safe, valued and included.

Certification

The Nest Nursery School is licensed by and complies with the rules and regulations of **Bright from the Start, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL)**.

Monthly Tuition & Fees

Enrollment Fee: \$350 per child

Monthly tuition rates and available schedule options are provided to families during the enrollment process, and are included below for the 2026-2027 School Year.

	CLASSROOM AGES	SCHOOL DAY 8:00am - 3:30pm	FULL DAY 8:00am - 5:30pm
	NUTHATCH 3 months - 12 months	\$1923	\$2435
	HUMMINGBIRD 10 months - 24 months	\$1,836	\$2,325
	WREN 24 months - 36 months	\$1,746	\$2,211
	BLUE HERON 36 months - 60 months	\$1,659	\$2,101

Payment

Initial enrollment fees for new families are accepted through Zelle. Once enrolled, all invoices, payments and school transactions are managed through FAMLY, our family communication and payment platform.

FAMLY offers many tools for communication and school management. For tuition, we have found that FAMLY's direct ACH payment option is the most cost-effective for families, with a flat \$2 transaction fee. Tuition is due in advance on the first business day of each month. Tuition is not reduced for absences, family vacations, holidays or school closures due to weather, power outages or other circumstances beyond the school's control.

Late Payment Charges

If tuition is not received by the due date, a \$10 daily late fee will be applied. If an account remains unpaid for 5 business days, the child may not attend school until the account is up to date. After 15 days of nonpayment, enrollment may be forfeited.

The school reserves the right to pursue unpaid balances through collections or small claims. Families are responsible for reasonable costs associated with collection efforts, including applicable court or attorney fees.

Honoring Our Shared Time

For the 2026–2027 school year, we thoughtfully expanded our operating hours to better reflect the realities of modern family life; including living in Atlanta, consistently ranked among the cities with the most challenging traffic in the United States. We recognize that balancing work, family, and commuting is complex, and our schedule was intentionally designed to provide greater flexibility.

Beyond that flexibility, our community is built on mutual respect. We believe every child, family, and educator deserves a full and enriching life beyond the school walls. When one person's schedule consistently impacts another's, the effects ripple throughout our community.

A chronically late educator disrupts the rhythm of the classroom and diminishes the quality of care. A chronically late parent prevents educators from completing their professional responsibilities and returning to their own families. Living in community means honoring one another's time.

If the school observes a pattern of chronically late pickups, we will request an in-person partnership meeting to better understand the circumstances and develop a plan together.

Care may be paused until this meeting takes place to ensure we can come into alignment.

Possible partnership solutions may include:

- Coordinating with another Nest family to pick up your child when you are delayed.
- Authorizing a trusted family member or friend as an approved pickup person.

If, after working together, we determine that our schedules cannot reasonably align, The Nest reserves the right to conclude that our program is not the best fit for your family's scheduling needs. In these cases, enrollment may be discontinued.

Withdrawal Policy

We understand that families' circumstances change. When a family needs to leave The Nest, we ask for **30 days' written notice** so we have time to thoughtfully plan for the transition and begin welcoming a new family. During the 30-day notice period, tuition remains due whether or not the child attends. If less than 30 days' notice is provided, the school may charge up to **one additional month of tuition** to help cover the cost of the space that was reserved for the child. As a small nonprofit school, our operating costs and educator salaries depend on maintaining enrollment. Filling an opening is not always immediate. We intentionally onboard new families through a thoughtful process that can take several weeks. The notice period helps us manage these transitions responsibly while protecting the stability of our classrooms and staff.

Pre-K Withdrawal

For children enrolled in their Pre-K year, we ask for **60 days' written notice** when withdrawing after the school year begins. This additional time reflects the unique enrollment patterns of Pre-K programs, where families may receive offers from other schools several weeks into the year. The longer notice period gives us time to plan for the opening without unnecessarily disrupting classroom communities or moving children and educators between classrooms.

We understand that some circumstances are unexpected. Families are encouraged to communicate with school leadership as early as possible so we can work together through the transition with care.

Confidentiality

Unless we receive written consent, information about your child will not be shared except when required by law or by our regulatory or partnering agencies. All child records are kept confidential.

Transfer of Records

When your child transitions to a new classroom at The Nest, their records are transferred internally. If your child transitions to another school, families may submit a written request with instructions for where records should be sent.

Photography & Social Media

Beginning in 2026, The Nest will no longer feature identifiable images of children's faces on social media in any form. We recognize the growing concerns around artificial intelligence, facial recognition and the collection and use of digital data. Protecting children's privacy is an important part of our responsibility to families. The Nest may share photographs that show children from behind or in ways that eliminate identifiable and trackable features. These images may be used to document classroom experiences and share the work of our school without identifying individual children.

With family consent, photographs may also be used in printed school materials and family newsletters. We will always approach photography with care and respect for the privacy of every child and family.

Outings & Field Trips

Outings are an important part of learning and community building at The Nest. They may include neighborhood walks, parks, gardens, local businesses, maker spaces and other community locations connected to children's current project work.

During the 2026–2027 school year, we plan to introduce *Field Site Visits* for each classroom approximately 1–2 times per year, typically in the fall and spring. These visits will be announced well in advance and will require family participation. Families will transport their child to and from the site from home or school. Field Site Visits are designed to connect classroom learning and project work with our surrounding community while creating opportunities for families, children and educators to collaborate and learn together.

A printed permission form will be provided before all field trips and outings. Children must have a signed permission form to participate. Families are always welcome and encouraged to join. All outings follow applicable Georgia DECAL requirements and include appropriate supervision and safety procedures.

Inserimento

Inserimento is an Italian concept describing a gradual introduction to school and the process of building trust within a new community.

Before beginning, children and families are invited to spend time with their educators in the classroom. These visits typically last 30–60 minutes and provide an opportunity to meet, ask questions and become familiar with the environment. Every child responds to separation differently. We ask families to remain flexible during the first few weeks and allow time for a gradual transition when needed. Separation anxiety is a normal part of development, and consistent routines help children build confidence and trust.

As children become comfortable, a short and predictable goodbye is often best. If a child is having significant difficulty settling, educators may contact the family to discuss next steps. For a child who has been inconsolable for more than one hour, educators may ask a parent or caregiver to pick them up. We value this transition as an important time for children, families and educators to begin building relationships and a sense of belonging.

Child to Staff Ratios

The Nest Nursery School provides student/teacher ratios well below those allowed by the State of Georgia. Each class is guaranteed an additional support person for major transitions as well as small groups and support from our pedagogy and studio team, daily.

Nuthatch (infants) 9:2

Hummingbird (young toddlers) 12:2

Wren (older toddlers/3 year olds) 15:2

Blue heron (3-5 year olds) 19:2

Personal Belongings

Please label *all* items brought from home with your child's name to prevent items from becoming misplaced or lost.

We are not responsible for lost or misplaced items that are not properly labeled.



What to Bring for Infants (12 weeks to 12 months)

- Enough bottles of breast milk or formula for one day's feedings should be brought already prepared to school each day. Formula must be already mixed and prepared. **Bottles should be clearly marked with the child's name and date.** Empty bottles are returned to the family each day.
- Any solids for the child to eat at school.
- A supply of diapers and *wipes (*if your preference isn't Kirkland's Unscented Wipes).
- At least 2 complete changes of clothes.
- Any comfort items that your child needs such as pacifiers, blankies, lovie, etc.

What to Bring for Children Ages One and Older:

- A sippy cup for water or water bottle, which should be brought home each day and returned full of water the next day.
- If your child is a young toddler (under 18 months) and still needs a bottle during the school day, we will work with you during the transition to a cup.
- At least 2 complete changes of clothes (more if your child is potty training).
- Nap and comfort items that your child needs for naptime such as pacifiers, blankies, a lovie.

What Not to Bring to School

To help keep classrooms calm and focused we ask families to leave toys, dress-up accessories and jewelry at home. These items can become distractions, create conflict between children and can be difficult to keep track of during the day.

Children are welcome to bring a comfort item when needed, especially during transitions or rest time. Please check with your child's educator if you are unsure whether an item is appropriate for school.

Talking With Your Child About Home Items

It can help to create a simple and consistent message:

"That toy is special to you, so it stays at home. School has lots of things for you to play with. Your toy will be waiting for you when you get home."

If your child wants to bring something from home, invite them to look at it, play with it or place it in a special spot at home before leaving for school. Keeping the boundary consistent helps children understand that home and school are different spaces with different materials and expectations.

Thank you for helping us protect the calm, collaborative environment we work hard to create at The Nest.

Absences

If your child will be absent from school, please contact the school by 8:30 a.m. so that we can plan accordingly. Email or Family are the preferable forms of contact regarding absences.

Tips for a Successful Goodbye at Drop-Off

Our best advice at The Nest: **keep goodbyes short, loving and predictable.** For example:

“Mama is going to work and you’re going to have fun at school. I’ll be back after nap and snack. I love you. Have a wonderful day!”

A few things that can help:

1. **Never sneak away.** Always say goodbye so your child knows you are leaving and can trust that you will return.
2. **Create a routine.** A consistent morning and drop-off routine helps children know what to expect.
3. **Talk simply and calmly.** Let your child know where you are going and when you will return.
4. **Work with your educator.** Consistency between home and school helps children feel safe and supported.
5. **Stay calm and confident.** Children often take their cues from us. Your confidence helps communicate that school is a safe place.
6. **Give it time.** Familiarity builds confidence. Visit the school, meet educators and talk positively about your child’s classroom before the first day.

Most importantly, **trust the process.** Love, consistency, clear communication and predictable routines help children build confidence during new experiences in new places.

Authorized & Unauthorized Pick-Up

Children may only be released to parents/guardians or individuals listed as Emergency and Release Contacts. Anyone not listed must have **prior written authorization** from the parent/guardian and must present a valid photo ID at pick-up.

If a child remains at school after closing and we cannot reach the family, we will contact the listed Emergency and Release Contacts. If we are unable to reach an authorized adult within **two hours**, we will contact the appropriate child protective services agency.

Child Custody

Without court documentation, both parents/guardians are considered to have equal rights to their child. The Nest will follow the most recent certified court order, restraining order or court-ordered visitation schedule provided to the school. We cannot determine custody without legal documentation.

Right to Refuse Child Release

For the safety of the child, The Nest may refuse release to anyone who appears impaired by alcohol, drugs or another condition that may make transporting or caring for the child unsafe. We may contact another authorized adult or emergency services as needed.

Year-Round Calendar and School Closings

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The Nest provides year-round care and is closed periodically for school holidays, staff professional development and scheduled breaks. Please refer to the annual school calendar for specific closing dates. Because tuition is based on an annual budget, tuition is not reduced for scheduled school closings. The Nest offers year-round enrollment.

Celebrations & Holidays

The Nest honors the natural cycles of the year and welcomes the traditions and cultures that are meaningful to our families. We do not promote specific holidays, but families are encouraged to share meaningful traditions with their child's classroom.

Birthdays

Birthdays are celebrated with a special classroom tea party and a candle celebration. A few weeks before your child's birthday, your educator will reach out to schedule a time for your family to join the class.

Tea parties are a meaningful time for the class to celebrate your child together. Children are celebrated with a favorite song, well wishes and time with their friends. To support fairness and inclusion, we do not accept outside treat bags, snacks, treats, gifts or party favors for birthdays or holiday celebrations. The classroom tea party provides an intentional and special way for every child to be celebrated as part of their community.

Napping/Rest Time

Infants sleep according to their individual schedules and are placed on their backs until they can roll independently.

After lunch, all children participate in a quiet rest period as required by Georgia licensing. Children rest for at least 30 minutes and may transition to quiet activities if they do not sleep. Children are not required to remain lying down for more than one hour. Children over 18 months or those who are walking sleep on cots with a sheet, blanket and comfort item from home. Children age 2 and younger may not use pillows.

Diapering

Diapering is an important part of daily life in our infant and toddler classrooms and provides meaningful opportunities for relationship building and consent-based care. Educators use diapering as a time to connect one-on-one with each child while helping them understand that their body and boundaries matter.

Educators communicate with children throughout the process and tell them what is going to happen before they touch or move their body. For example:

"It's time for a diaper change. I'm going to pick you up now. Is that okay? I'm going to wipe your bottom. Now I'm going to put on a clean diaper. All done. You can get up."

Even with infants and children who cannot yet respond verbally, we narrate what we are doing and give them opportunities to participate, pause and communicate.

This practice begins our schoolwide culture of consent, teaching children from the earliest age that their bodies deserve respect and that adults will communicate with them about what happens to their bodies.

The Nest follows all Georgia licensing hygiene and sanitation requirements, with procedures posted at each changing area. Families may provide cloth diapers and wipes as long as appropriate materials are provided for transporting soiled diapers home.

Toilet Learning

Toilet learning is a developmental process best supported through a partnership between families and educators. We begin when a child shows signs of physical, emotional and psychological readiness and work with families to create a consistent plan.

Because toilet learning can require additional time and support in a busy classroom, The Nest provides additional classroom support during peak “toileting season.” This helps maintain the daily classroom flow while giving children who are new to toileting the attention and assistance they need as they develop this new skill. Children of all genders use the same bathrooms. In our 3–5 year old classroom, an optional privacy curtain is available.

Philosophy of Guidance & Discipline

At The Nest, we see children as **powerful, capable and deserving of respect**. We believe positive social development grows through strong relationships with caring adults.

Our guidance practices are informed by **Conscious Discipline’s Brain State Model** and other developmentally appropriate approaches. Educators acknowledge feelings, communicate clearly, redirect when needed, use natural consequences and help children practice problem-solving. Each classroom includes a calming space where children can pause, regulate and find support.

The following are never used at The Nest:

- Corporal punishment, including spanking, shaking, jerking or squeezing
- Shaming, humiliation or verbal abuse
- Withholding food as punishment
- Retaliation or intentionally causing distress
- Labeling a child as “bad”
- Describing bodily functions as gross
- Timeout as a discipline strategy
- Anything not in alignment with our anti-bias policy

Communication & Family Partnership

We believe strong communication between home and school supports children and strengthens our community. Most communication takes place through FAMLY and email.

Families can expect:

- Daily classroom communication through FAMLY, including updates and documentation of children’s experiences.

- Weekly classroom newsletters with information about projects, classroom experiences, upcoming events and needs.
- School-wide communications from administration by email.
- Family meetings and community building events throughout the year.
- Class Meetings twice a year, in Fall and Spring.
- Conferences in Fall and Spring with full educator team.
- Opportunities to have in-person or virtual conferences upon request.

We view communication as a partnership and welcome questions, ideas and ongoing dialogue with families.

Family Participation & School Committees

Family participation is welcomed and encouraged at The Nest, though **volunteering is not required**. Families are welcome to visit, join classroom experiences and participate in school events. Please communicate with your child's educators before visiting so we can protect classroom routines such as meals, rest and transitions.

Families may participate by:

- Chaperoning field trips and Field Site Visits
- Sharing a skill or interest with the school
- Joining a classroom or school event
- Helping with community events and fundraisers
- Participating in school committees
- Supporting classroom projects and experiences

As a nonprofit, The Nest benefits greatly from family involvement in building our community and supporting school initiatives. We encourage families to participate in ways that fit their time and interests.

Class Parents

Each classroom will have one or more Class Parents who help strengthen connections within the classroom community. Class Parents may coordinate class socials, family support, teacher appreciation and other community-building efforts.

Information and sign-ups for Class Parents will be shared with families at the end of August.

Cell Phone Usage

The times you spend in the center are important times of communication between the school and home. In order to make the best use of these opportunities and to meet your child's needs during these times of transition, we ask that you not use your cell phone at any time, during pick-up/drop-off or while inside the center.

Health Policies

The Nest is committed to keeping our school community as healthy as possible. We are not able to provide care for children who are ill, so we ask families to keep children home when they are sick or experiencing symptoms that may spread to others. Keeping children home when they are unwell helps protect our community and gives children the time and rest they need to recover.

If your child is experiencing any of the symptoms below, please keep them home from school:

Fever	If the child has a fever over 100.4 for any reason they cannot attend school. The child should be fever-free for 24 hours <u>without medication</u> before returning to school.
Pinkeye	The child will need to see a doctor. Typically doctors prescribe eye drops, which take 24 hours to be effective. Please refer to doctor's recommendations on returning to the program.
Strep Throat	The child should return only after 24 hours on medication. The child must be showing signs of improvement and be willing to eat and drink. They must also be fever-free without fever-reducing medication for 24 hours.
Diarrhea and/or vomiting	The child should not come to school until he/she is deemed non-contagious by a physician or has had no diarrhea or vomiting for 24 hours.
Chicken Pox	The child should not return to school until all pox are scabbed over. They must also be fever-free without fever-reducing medication for 24 hours.
Runny noses/ Coughs	If your child's runny nose is impacting their ability to participate in the program, they should stay home. If the child's cough prevents the children from sleeping or participating in school activities, they should stay home.
Head Lice	The child may return to school when free of ALL nits. In order to remove nits, it is usually necessary for the child's hair to be well combed with a special nit removal comb after treatment with the medicated shampoo.
COVID-19	Children should always be tested when exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19. If a child tests positive, they should stay home until they are fever-free without the use of fever-reducing drugs and have improved symptoms for 48 hours. The Nest reserves the right to require a negative test to come into school in the case of significant COVID exposure or an outbreak at the program.

Illness

If your child becomes sick while at school, we will contact you to arrange pick-up. Sick children should be picked up **within one hour** of notification. If you cannot arrive within that time, please arrange for an authorized Emergency and Release Contact to pick up your child.

If we cannot reach a parent or guardian, we will contact the Emergency and Release Contacts listed on your enrollment forms.

Communicable Diseases

When a child or employee has a reportable illness, The Nest follows all Georgia Department of Public Health reporting requirements. Families will be notified by email and/or written notice when appropriate so they can take any recommended precautions.

Medications

Medication may only be administered with a completed Authorization for Medication Form and must be provided in its original, properly labeled container.

Administrators administer all medications according to the authorization form, including the prescribed dosage and timing. Any observed reaction will be documented and communicated to the family.

To keep medication records current and ensure safe storage, all medications must be picked up after two weeks. If medication is still needed after two weeks, a new authorization form must be completed and the medication resubmitted. The Nest cannot store medication on campus beyond emergency EpiPens. Families are responsible for picking up medications when they are no longer authorized or needed.

Non-prescription medications:

Before dispensing non-prescription medications, the school requires a note and direction signed by the child's pediatrician. Non-prescription medication shall not be administered for more than a 3-day period unless a written order by the physician is received.

Non-prescription topical ointments:

The Enrollment & Acknowledgement Agreement includes a section for the authorization of the administration of non-prescription topical ointments, such as diaper cream, sunscreen and insect repellent. The school will not administer these items unless authorized by the parent on the Agreement.

Emergency Procedures

The Nest maintains emergency plans and conducts regular drills to prepare children and staff. We conduct regular fire drills, tornado drills and lockdown drills.

Severe Weather

- Children and staff move to designated interior areas away from windows and doors.

- Teachers bring attendance records and confirm all children are accounted for.
- Everyone remains in place until the advisory has passed.
- Administration contacts emergency services when needed and communicates with families.

Evacuation

- Administration initiates evacuation and contacts 911 when necessary.
- Teachers bring attendance records and move children to the designated evacuation site.
- Children are accounted for and remain with their teachers.
- Families and Emergency Contacts are notified of the situation and location.
- Children remain with staff until released to an authorized adult.

If the building becomes unsafe or loses essential utilities, families will be contacted for prompt pick-up.

Serious Injury

For a serious or life-threatening injury, 911 will be called immediately. Families will be notified and the child will receive emergency medical care as needed. A staff member will remain with the child until a parent/guardian arrives.

Illness or Minor Injury

Families will be contacted when a child becomes ill or experiences an injury requiring attention. If a parent/guardian is unavailable, an Emergency Contact will be called. Required incident reports and regulatory notifications will be completed.

Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect

The Nest staff are **mandated reporters** and are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect to the appropriate authorities when there is reasonable cause for concern. This includes physical, sexual or emotional abuse and neglect, regardless of where it may have occurred.

Reports are handled by the appropriate child protective services agency. The Nest will cooperate with investigations and maintain confidentiality as required.

Lost or Missing Child

If a child becomes lost or separated from the group, staff will immediately begin searching and secure the surrounding area. If the child is not located within five minutes, 911 will be called and the family will be notified.

Safety Policies

Clothing & Shoes

Please send children in **comfortable, washable clothing** that allows for movement and independent dressing. Children will participate in painting, water and sand play, gardening, outdoor play and other messy

experiences, ***so please avoid clothing you do not want stained.*** Shoes should be secure and appropriate for running, climbing and active play. **Flip-flops and backless shoes are not permitted.** Simple clothing without complicated buttons, belts or fasteners helps children manage their day independently.

Safe Sleep

The Nest follows Georgia licensing and current safe-sleep guidelines:

- Infants are placed **on their backs in an approved crib** unless a physician provides written alternative instructions.
- Cribs remain free of blankets, pillows, toys, bumpers and other loose items.
- Approved sleep sacks or wearable blankets may be used when provided by the family and properly fitted.
- Swaddling, positioning devices and sleep monitors require written physician authorization.
- Infants who fall asleep elsewhere will be moved to an approved crib.
- Crib bedding is changed daily or as needed. Mat and cot bedding is individually maintained and laundered regularly.

Extreme Weather & Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is limited when temperatures or air quality are unsafe. The Nest follows current Georgia licensing guidance and uses weather and air-quality conditions to determine when outdoor play should be modified or canceled. For school closures due to severe weather, The Nest follows **Atlanta Public Schools**.

If APS closes due to weather, The Nest will also close.

Building or Utility Emergencies

If the school loses power, water, climate control or experiences another condition that affects safe operation, families will be notified by FAMILY, text, phone or email. If safe care cannot continue, families or Emergency Contacts will be asked to pick up their children as soon as possible. Staff will remain with children until they are safely picked up.

Fire Safety

The Nest maintains required fire safety equipment and conducts **monthly fire drills**. Emergency evacuation procedures are reviewed regularly with staff and practiced with children in developmentally appropriate ways.

Injuries

Classrooms and outdoor areas are regularly inspected for safety. Minor injuries are treated by trained staff and documented for families. Families will be contacted for injuries requiring medical attention.

For a serious medical emergency, 911 will be called immediately and the child will be transported by ambulance for emergency care. Families and Emergency Contacts will be notified as soon as possible. A Nest staff member will remain with the child until an authorized adult arrives.

Medical Costs

Families are responsible for medical costs resulting from illness or injury occurring while their child is at The Nest Nursery School Family Handbook / August 2026

school.

A Special Note About Biting

Biting is a common part of early childhood development, especially as children learn to communicate, manage strong emotions and develop self-control. While biting can be upsetting, our response is focused on safety, understanding and helping children develop new skills rather than punishment.

When biting happens:

1. We immediately care for and comfort the child who was bitten and clean the area.
2. We support the child who bit with calm, developmentally appropriate guidance and help them find another way to communicate their needs.
3. Families of both children are notified in writing. Open communication with families is especially important when biting becomes a pattern.
4. When a child is biting frequently, educators may request a family meeting to better understand what the child may be communicating and to align on consistent guidance strategies between home and school.
5. As a new support practice, The Nest may provide a dedicated educator “shadow” for a child who is frequently biting. The shadow helps closely observe patterns, anticipate needs, support regulation and reduce opportunities for biting while the child develops alternative skills.
6. Depending on the child and situation, we may also recommend additional supports such as a chewable item or other sensory strategies.

We also pay attention to children who are being bitten frequently and work with them to develop language, boundaries and strategies for responding.

Every child and situation is different. Our goal is to protect all children while supporting the child who is biting with compassion, consistency and appropriate developmental guidance. The Nest does not use exclusion or expulsion as a first response to developmentally typical challenging behaviors.

Nutrition Policies

The Nest provides a fresh, thoughtfully prepared food program for children 12 months and older that meets Georgia and CACFP guidelines. Our school chef, **Ray Fleming**, curates weekly menus using fresh ingredients and local produce whenever possible. **Meals are vegetarian and nut-free.**

Meals & Snacks

Lunch and snacks are served family-style, giving children opportunities to explore food, practice independence and enjoy meals together. Weekly menus are shared with families.

Infant Feeding

This year, The Nest has added a dedicated infant menu alongside our weekly school menu. It is designed
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around the developmental feeding needs of young infants and the introduction of solids.

Families provide breast milk, formula and appropriate foods for children under 12 months. Educators work closely with families through an individual **Infant Feeding Plan**, updating it as new foods and developmental needs emerge. Bottles and food containers must be clearly labeled with the child's name and date.

The Nest supports breastfeeding and follows all Georgia requirements for infant feeding, bottle preparation, storage and safe feeding. Honey is not served to children under one year.

Food Allergies & Special Diets

Allergies are taken very seriously at The Nest. Our menus are planned with school-wide allergies in mind, and families must notify administration immediately of any new allergy or change to an existing allergy.

We maintain posted allergy notices and communication protocols so that our chef, educators, administrators and substitute educators are aware of each child's needs. Families must provide current written allergy information and an appropriate physician-approved emergency action plan when required.

For severe allergies or highly specialized diets, The Nest may ask families to provide food that meets their child's specific dietary needs.

Severe Food Allergies or Special Diets

In order to ensure the safety of children with severe food allergies (extreme and rapid reactions, allergic to many foods, etc.) or those requiring a highly specialized diet (gluten free, strictly vegan, kosher, etc.), the school reserves the right to request that families bring their child's food that has been prepared according to individual needs.

Family Handbook Acknowledgment

By completing enrollment, families acknowledge that they have received and reviewed the The Nest Nursery School Family Handbook and agree to follow the policies and expectations outlined within it.

This acknowledgment was completed digitally as part of the enrollment process.

We understand that questions may arise as you review the handbook. Please reach out to administration at any time for clarification or support. We are always happy to talk through a policy or expectation with you.

We are so grateful that you have chosen to be a part of the Nest Community!

