



The Ark Children's Center

3425 Emory Church Road

Olney, MD 20832

301-774-5369 ~ www.oakdale.church/ark

October 19, 2020

Dear Ark families,

We are thrilled to **WELCOME** you to The Ark Children's Center for the upcoming school year! Since school closed last March due to the COVID pandemic, we have been working diligently to reopen with the best health and safety practices in place for our staff, students, and families. There will be many changes this year due to new mandates, recommendations and guidelines from Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Center for Disease Control (CDC), Montgomery County Health Department (MCHD) and Office of Child Care (OCC) which oversees our MSDE Nursery Licensure. Please be assured that additional health and safety "best practices" are being implemented by our leadership team during these extraordinary times.

During closure, our leadership has been stretching our brains in new directions for our ARK community. We know that the year ahead will be filled with God's goodness and grace as we explore Christian teachings and values with your children. We are eager to reacclimate your child(ren) back into school routines and to connect children with friends in a variety of creative and socially distanced ways.

Please read this information carefully! You will find the answers to many of your questions about NEW school hours, lunch policy, drop-off, and pick-up routines and our first-ever Virtual Back to School Event. We are providing links to all forms required for enrollment and request that all forms be completed and returned digitally. Please email arkoffice@oakdale.church if you have additional questions, keeping in mind that our offices are open from **9:30-2:30 daily**. Should we miss your call, please leave a message on our answering machine. **Your cooperation in staying informed and thoroughly completing all required paperwork is greatly appreciated and will save hours of follow-up emails and phone communications during a time of very busy and important school preparations.**

NEW... Hours and Days of Operations

- All classes will operate from 8:30 AM- 12:30 PM
- 2-days a week classes will be at school on Monday & Tuesday- First classes on Nov. 2-3
- 3-days a week classes will be at school on Wednesday, Thursday & Friday- First classes begin Nov.4-6
- 5-day classes will be at school Monday through Friday. First week- Nov. 2-6
- **Late Arrivals should report to Door A and use the callbox to reach the office.**

NEW...Entrance into our School Building and Health Screenings

Please line up (socially distanced and with face coverings) at the assigned door for entrance into the building. Doors A & B are located on the Georgia Avenue side of the building. Door C is located on the east side of the building and can be reached by driving past the white historic chapel and playground to the church entrance.

Doors will open promptly at 8:30 AM at which time you should:

- **Give your child some love and permission to have a great day at the **KISS & HUG** spot!**
- **Approach the Door as invited by ARK staff, take your child's temperature with your family temporal thermometer in front of our staff so we can document temperature.**
- **Provide us with a Yes/No answer to the following questions:**
 - Has your child had a fever or measured a temperature of 100.4 since last in the school?

- Has your child had sickness symptoms since yesterday (i.e., sore throat, runny nose, congestion, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, headaches, body aches, nausea, diarrhea, loss of taste or smell)?
- Has your child had close or prolonged contact with anyone known to have COVID symptoms since yesterday?
- Have you traveled out of state recently? If so where?
 - If so, you will be asked if you have complied with CDC guidelines regarding return to state guidelines.

Emergency Closings/Weather Related Closings & Delayed Openings

Parents will be notified by email of our school's operation status in the event of school closures. We will post our school closing information on WTOP and on our school answering machine after 7 AM. Please continue to watch MCPS announcements for weather-related closures as our program will align to these closures.

In the event of a delayed opening due to inclement weather, we will operate from 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM. Children should bring lunch to school on these days.

Review of Student Records

Students with incomplete medical records will NOT be allowed to begin school on November 2nd, No Exceptions! Our Office Assistant will notify you by October 20th of outstanding information needed to complete your child's records.

- **All incomplete or missing records information** must be scanned and returned to arkoffice@oakdale.church. Please use the SUBJECT LINE to reference: **MEDICAL RECORDS-LAST NAME**
- **Emergency Cards** must be completed and returned no later than **Monday, October 26, 2020**. Please be sure every item is completed on this form as it will be returned if any items are left incomplete. This information is reviewed by our Licensing Agent upon their inspections and they look at every detail of this card.
- **All About My Child Survey-** Your child's staff members will appreciate knowing more about your child as we begin the school year. Please send this completed form to school with your child on the first day of classes.

Concerns, Allergies, Medications

To discuss a child's special needs, allergies, and/or custody concerns, parents may call the office prior to school starting on November 2nd. We are eager to work as a team to develop a plan and make your experience and your child's transition into preschool as smooth as possible. Please drop any required medication with completed Medication Authorization Forms to the Drop off Box at the entrance doors on your child's first day of classes.

NEW...Tuition Payments using SimpleGive

Due to COVID-19 and efforts to reduce manual processing of payments, we will only be accepting monthly tuition and **require that your payment be made electronically via SimpleGive.** This new payment platform allows for direct debit from checking and/or savings accounts and will also provide a credit card payment option, with associated fees. Please sign-up for re-occurring payments to avoid late payments.

- **Payments are due on the first day of the month. Late charges will be charged for any tuition paid after the 10th day of the month.** Thereafter, an additional late fee of ten dollars will be assessed if the payment is not posted by the 20th day and 30th days of the month.
- **Your November installment has been paid by choosing to RETURN to The ARK. Tuition will be collected December- May,** with the fees paid at registration applied to June tuition.

NEW...Outdoor Play & Discovery Spaces

Outdoor play and learning experiences are planned this school year and will give children the opportunity to **CREATE, WONDER, EXPLORE AND EXPAND** thinking. It will also provide a break from wearing masks throughout the day.

1. Please be sure children are dressed appropriately for outdoor times.
2. Children will not be required to wear masks outdoors.
3. Playground access is limited to school hours only. The playground is CLOSED before and after school.

Class Shutterfly Sites

You will be receiving an invitation from Shutterfly on Wednesday, October 21st, inviting you to join your class Share Site where information will be distributed on a weekly basis. Stay connected to **Class News**, ways to **Build Your Family Faith, Instill a Love of Reading, and Continue the Fun at Home. Also, of importance, News from the Office, Helpful Links, and Parent Resources.** Get excited about the many photographs of class happening and your children at work and play!

- It is best to view/access these class Share Sites from a web browser as the phone app does not allow full viewing capabilities of the posted information.

Student Postcards will be mailed the last week of October. Be watching for this important postcard where you will learn your teachers' names, room #, and entrance door. Signs will be displayed in the parking lots to help with location of entrance doors.

NEW...Virtual Back to School Event- Thursday, October 29th.

We invite you and your child to take a "sneak peek at classrooms" virtually during a guided classroom tour by your child's teachers. We hope that these videos will help you to better understand our operations during a time when parents and guardians will be restricted from the building. Get ready for school and be excited about the many new classroom happenings by viewing these videos on class Shutterfly sites!

NEW... School Supplies are required for each individual child's use in the classroom.

Parents are asked to provide the following on the first day of classes.

- Kindly send supplies to school in a sealed gallon zip lock bag with your child's name on the outside of the baggie and all supplies in their original boxes. The children will be organizing their school supplies here at school on the first day of class.
- One zipped binder pouch (approx. 8x10 inch) with 3 gromet holes to secure supplies
- One pair of blunt-tip safety scissors
- One box (4 colors) of DRY ERASE MARKERS for white boards (Fine Tip)
- One box of Crayola Broad Line Markers (10 Colors)
- One 3-pack of JUMBO Glue Sticks
- One box of Crayola JUMBO Crayons (8 Colors) for 2s & 3s students
- One box of Crayola LARGE CRAYONS (16 Colors) for 4s students
- **YES-** You paid a materials fee at registration (\$125) those fees are being allocated to help offset the tremendous increases in prices for consumable supplies and cleaning supplies during this COVID time. If these supplies are a hardship, please contact arkoffice@oakdale.church for assistance.

Accidents Happen at school that might require a change of clothes.

- Each child should bring a change of clothes to include:
 1. clean pull on pants, pull shirt, socks, and underwear (or several diapers/travel pack of baby wipes).
 2. **NEW:** an extra face mask to be kept at school.

3. **NEW:** Please place these in a plastic (shoebox sized plastic bin with lid) that can be stored in the classroom with your child's name clearly labeled on the narrow width of the plastic bin.

Lunch Policy and Guidelines ~ We are a NUT-FREE School!

We care deeply about the health and safety of all children in our care. We work very hard to educate parents and staff about the medical dangers associated with children who have nut allergies. We have children in our program who are highly allergic to nut products and ask for your commitment/cooperation to keep our school environment safe. Nut allergies are often severe and even a tiny amount of exposure (taste, touch, or smell) to nut particles or residue can cause strong reactions. In extreme cases, without medical interventions, the person can die within minutes.

Over the years we have educated children who “love peanut butter sandwiches and crackers” to make other food choices at school. When children understand that “peanut butter and nut products” can make their friends sick, they are willing to try new food choices. Please talk to your child about this food safety issue and prepare your child for making different lunch choices to help keep everyone safe at school. Some helpful suggestions and guidelines:

- We will not allow your child to eat **nut/peanut butter** products at school! Encourage understanding (of children with peanut/nut allergies) by using words like, “It’s not okay to take peanut butter/nuts to school because it can make your friends sick.” **Please refrain from sending “soy, seed, or nut” butters in your child’s lunch as it is very difficult for staff to determine whether this is a nut product.**
 - We are unable to refrigerate lunches so pack accordingly and remember small portions. All **uneaten foods will be disposed of at the end of lunchtime** and will not be returned home.
- **NEW... NO LUNCH BOXES or PLASTIC CONTAINERS** should be sent to school at this time. **Please pack student lunches in paper lunch bags with disposable plastic baggies.** We are unable to accept reusable plasticware, sippy cups, or thermos containers.
- **Help us by labeling the OUTSIDE of your disposable child’s lunch bag with first name initial and full last name.**
 - Involve your child in a variety of lunch choices. Ask your child what other friends are eating during lunch time. **Encourage your child to help pack a healthy lunch. Model good food choices.**
 - **Read labels carefully and seek foods that are not processed in facilities that process any item with nuts.** Be very careful to avoid bulk food choices, seasonal baked cupcakes, and decorated cookies. Check labels carefully as many of these seasonal food items are processed in facilities that process nuts.
- Try some fun lunch alternatives . . .
- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Applesauce | Fruit Cups | Graham Crackers | Pizza |
| Yogurt | Cold Cuts | Fresh Fruits | Celery with soft cheese |
| Mini Bagels | Cheese Sticks | Mini Carrots | Pita Pockets |
| Cold Spaghetti | Cut Vegetables/Dip | Favorite Leftovers | Goldfish Crackers |
| Pretzels | Dried Fruit | Raisins | Crackers & Hummus |
- **Birthday Celebrations:** We celebrate all students on their birthdays! If you wish to send in a birthday treat, contact the office to make arrangements with your child’s teacher (one week) before their special day. Birthday treats are optional and must be store bought items. **NO GOODIE BAGS** or party decorations.

What is needed for a successful First Day and School Year?

- **PATIENCE & SMILES ... ☺** We know children will be a little anxious about leaving you at the door so you can help them by being positive and remaining calm. We encourage you to watch others and follow their lead. Words like, “it’s your turn now”, and “I can’t wait to hear about your school day” will ease any nervous feelings.
- **Prolonged “goodbyes”** make the separation process more difficult for your child. Our staff members are experts at calming children! You are welcome to call the office after 9:30 a.m. if an update is needed. We promise to call you if your child is unhappy for an extended time (more than 45 minutes after our day has begun).
- **NO BACKPACKS** will be allowed into school at this time.
- **Sneakers and rubber-soled shoes are a MUST for safe climbing and outdoor play.** No Crocs, flip flops, sandals, boots, or party shoes as our playground surface consists of wooden chips which cause splinters!
- **NO TOYS FROM HOME!**

Clubs Program

We are currently unable to offer an extended day option for CLUBS experience due to shared space restrictions and multi-staff supervision.

Parking Lot /Child Safety Reminders

1. Please start the year modeling **SAFETY!**
2. Drive *slowly* and *cautiously* through our parking lots. Respect our child safety zones by not driving through coned areas near the playground.
3. **Always** hold your child’s hand when crossing the parking lot area and waiting at doors for entrance into school. Please do not allow children to “run” ahead of you or be without your supervision.
4. Be sure to use sidewalks and always walk *in front* of parked vehicles.
5. **Never** leave younger/older siblings (under the age of eight years) unattended in the car. It is against the law (Maryland Family Law 5-801) and will be reported to the police!
6. Be sure you and your passengers are buckled into car seats/safety seats *before* moving your car.
7. **Never** leave your car engine running while away from your vehicle or inside our building.
8. Always avoid adult conversation between vehicles and in parking lot areas.

Withdrawals

If at any time you wish to withdraw from the preschool, a 30-day notice is required. No refunds will be provided at time of withdraw as stated in our policy agreements.

Keep the Office Informed

Throughout the year, be sure to update us of any changes in mailing address, phone numbers, email addresses, and Emergency Contact information. Email the office at: arkoffice@oakdale.church

I hope these reminders and updates are helpful to you. If you have any questions or concerns, please call us at 301-774-5369. We look forward to seeing you in early November and please be watching for postcards soon.

Wishing you God’s Goodness and Grace,

Susan Borst, Director