

The Branch Academy
Parent Handbook
2018-2019



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2018-2019 Branch Academy Families

Whether you are returning to us or joining our “school family” for the first time, we are very excited that you have chosen to spend this year with us. The staff has incredible lessons and activities planned and we look forward to sharing each day with our students in this wonderful facility.

Please take the time to review this Handbook. You will find useful information that should be helpful throughout the school year. Please sign and return the Parent Handbook Signature Page along with any comments or additional questions that you may have for us. From the beginning of your relationship with Branch, we intend to provide an open line of communication via email, phone call or conference. Please do not ever hesitate to contact us regarding your child and anything that pertains to his or her best interest.

Blessings,

Sue Popp and the Branch Academy Staff

Contents

Mission Statement	4
Philosophy.....	4
Registration and Schedule	5
Tuition.....	6
Additional Fees	8
Arrival and Dismissal Procedures.....	9
Branch Daily Schedule.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Discipline.....	13
Termination of Enrollment	15
Discharge Policy	15
Immunization and Medical Exam Forms.....	16
Health and Safety.....	16
Child Abuse and Neglect	16
Sickness.....	17
Medication.....	18
Classroom Volunteers.....	18
Separation Issues	18
Curriculum Extras.....	19
Toys from Home	20
Birthdays.....	20
Snack and Lunch	21
Branch Academy Uniform Policy	22
Change of Clothes.....	24
School Supplies	24
Nap Time.....	26
Smoke-Free Zone	26
Emergency and Evacuation Procedures.....	26
Conferences.....	29

Mission Statement

The Branch Academy Day School is dedicated to providing quality early childhood education to children ages 3-5 in the South Tampa area. Our curriculum consists of creative activities that foster academic and emotional growth in a nurturing “school family” environment. Our goal is to instill the love of learning in each child through a balance of instruction and exploration as we equip our students for a confident transition into Kindergarten and all future educational experiences.

Philosophy

The Branch Academy Day School is a private Pre-K3 and Pre-K preschool dedicated to providing the highest quality early childhood education in a small preschool setting for children in the South Tampa area. Our curriculum consists of creative, hands on activities that foster academic as well as social and emotional growth. This curriculum enhances each child’s individual development and lays a solid foundation of experiences at this important stage of life. We have established a staff of early childhood educators who, while creating a safe and nurturing “school family” environment, provide daily opportunity for instruction as well as exploration. We develop a partnership with our parents so that we can share the journey of growth and ensure each student’s success. We believe that children learn through play and aim to cultivate their curiosity and confidence through use of early literacy, dramatics, art and music. Our customized facility offers an old-fashioned schoolhouse feel but also includes the latest in educational resources and technologies. The outdoor spaces for gardening and climbing promote gross motor development as well as discovery of science in nature. We help each student develop a positive self-image, problem solving skills, and the ability to practice compassion and respect for other children and adults. Our goal at The Branch Academy is to instill the love of learning in each child and to equip our students with appropriate preparation for a confident transition into Kindergarten and all future educational experiences.

Registration and Schedule

We recommend that children must turn three years old by July 1st during the year of enrollment in order to apply for the Pre-K3 class. Our license requires students to be three years old in order to attend our facility and we begin the school year in early August. Our Pre-K3 group is truly more of a transitional class and the majority of the students who are admitted tend to have birthdays in the first semester or who have already turned four during the summer prior to fall of enrollment. There are only fourteen spots in this class and we require a two-year commitment once admitted into the school at this age. Families of our perspective students with summer birthdays most often opt to experience their second year of PreK3 at our facility or wait and seek to apply as a young four into the Pre-K group. We believe, when applicable, a gift of another year for Pre-K3 applicants having June-August birthdays is advantageous for our youngest students.

Children must turn four years old by September 1st of the year of enrollment in order to enroll in the Pre-K class. Rare exceptions to this policy are made only at the discretion of the Director.

Families of students who participate in our Pre-K3 class are asked to make a two-year commitment and are placed first during enrollment into the following school year's Pre-K class. From our establishment, this age group was created as an investment for our small school. After spending a year in Pre-K3, students are well-adjusted to Branch and they readily take on a leadership role in the Pre-K class. When a large number of Pre-K3 students move on to a different school for Pre-K, we lose that core of class leaders and an opportunity to easily transition the students who have made strong connections with other classmates and staff during their first year.

Applicants who are siblings of current Branch students or siblings of former Branch students will be given priority during the registration process.

All children must be fully toilet trained. Our students are given continued positive encouragement and opportunity to succeed in this area. We appreciate the cooperation and "coaching" involved, with regard to all toileting needs, between parents and teachers, at home and school, to do so.

The Branch Academy follows the School District of Hillsborough County school year calendar, including holidays, teacher workdays and any Early Release days. The Hillsborough County calendar is attached to this Handbook for your reference.

We offer the following weekly 5-Day programs:

Pre-K3 and Pre-K Half Day:

- 8:00 AM – Noon

Pre-K3 and Pre-K Full Day:

- 8:00 AM – 1:55 PM – Early Release Mondays
- 8:00 AM - 2:55 PM - Tuesdays through Fridays

After-the-Bell Program:

- 3:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Tuition

Upon acceptance of an Offer of Enrollment at The Branch Academy, a nonrefundable, and one time annual, registration/supply fee will **hold your child's spot** for the upcoming school year.

Should you choose to pay tuition (Day School or After the Bell) monthly, the yearly tuition will be divided in to 10 monthly installments for your convenience. The first tuition payment is payable in the spring during the enrollment process to **finalize your child's spot in his or her respective class**. That nonrefundable payment of tuition is the **first of your ten monthly installments**. Unless you pay in advance or setup an automatic withdrawal payment option through your bank, we will send invoices via email each month. Your tenth and final tuition payment will be due on May 1, 2019.

All tuition statements will be emailed through our Branch Billing process and our Branch Academy "Payment Envelopes" will be sent home monthly in your child's Communication Folder. Please place your tuition check into the Payment Envelope at home. The envelopes will easily travel, in your child's folder, back to the Branch Academy with payment enclosed. Checks should be made payable to "**The Branch Academy**". We ask that, for your own security, all payments be sent to school using the Payment Envelopes via your child's communication folder. Tuition is due by the 10th of each month and after that a \$25 late fee will be assessed. There is also a \$25 additional charge for any checks returned to the school to cover the cost of fees charged by our own bank when this occurs.

If you ever need an additional invoice statement for your records or accounting purposes, please let our office know. For your records, our FEIN# is 27-2924914.

2018-2019 School Year Pre-K3 and Pre-K Tuition:

Weekly Program	One Annual Payment (With a 2% discount)	Two Payments – August and January (With a 1.5% discount)	Monthly/ Total Cost
Pre-K3 Half Day 8:00 A.M. – Noon	\$7,987/yr.	\$4,035/semester	\$815/\$8,150
Pre-K3 Full Day 8:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.	\$8,771/yr.	\$4,430/semester	\$895/\$8,950
Pre-K Half Day 8:00 A.M. – Noon	\$7,987/yr.	\$4,035/semester	\$815/\$8,150
Pre-K Full Day 8:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M.	\$8,771/yr.	\$4,430/semester	\$895/\$8,950

Day Student Registration and Supply Fee -

- The non-refundable \$645 registration and supply fee is the **only supply fee that will be charged for the school year**. The \$645 fee is due upon first acceptance of an offer during the enrollment process.

2018-2019 School Year After the Bell:

Monthly Tuition:

- Mitchell Student 5 Days - \$420
- Currently Enrolled Day Student 5 Days - \$350

Sibling Discount:

- 5 Days - \$820 per month for two Mitchell siblings
- 5 Days - \$750 per month for one day student and one Mitchell sibling

Registration and Supply Fee -

- A non-refundable \$250 registration and supply fee is charged for the entire school year for a student to enroll in ATB.

Additional Fees

We hope you will understand that for all additional fees listed below, the intention is not to generate revenue, but instead to emphasize how important your consideration of these policies is.

- 1. Late Tuition:** Tuition is due no later than the 10th of each month. If payment is not received by the 10th of any month then a \$25 late fee will be assessed.

- 2. Late Pickup at school closing:** This applies to our After the Bell Families. The Branch Academy closes for the day at 5:30PM. Please make arrangements to have your child picked up and signed out by this time. We will assess a late fee of \$5/minute for every minute that your child is still present at the facility after 5:30, beginning at 5:31PM on the office computer screen clock. This fee will apply with no exceptions, and the fee will be invoiced to you via email the following day. If a true emergency prevents you from being here to pick up your child, please call or text (813.391.6868) to let us know **by 5:15 so that the school can plan accordingly for staffing**. We understand that our ATB parents are coming from their jobs, but we thank you for your consideration of our teachers as most have also put in a full workday with personal responsibilities, engagements and appointments.

- 3. Non-Notification Fee for Mitchell Elementary After the Bell Students:** Please make it a priority to inform us (by phone or e-mail) when your child is, **for any reason, not coming to Branch Academy after school from Mitchell**. This includes illness, Brownies, Girl Scouts, violin, play dates and any day when your child will be absent from the front of Mitchell at dismissal. When you put a note in your child's folder, call Mitchell to report an absence, or pick up your child early from Mitchell, please also notify us via phone or text at (813.391.6868) or e-mail (branch.academy@gmail.com) no later than 2PM on the day of the absence because staff has already begun the transition to day school car line and left for ATB pick-up. When we do not find a Branch After the Bell student in line at Mitchell, we must wait until the teacher in charge confirms with the Mitchell office that the student is not expected at Branch. Sometimes even the office cannot confirm the student's change of plans, and this creates needless worry and wasted time for everyone. The failure to notify us of an absence will result in your being charged a non-notification fee similar to our late fee. This flat fee of \$10 will be charged in the event that your child has alternative after school plans and we do not receive notice (prior to 2:00 PM) that your child will not be in line with the other Branch students. The fee will be charged via invoice within the next day. We know that you will appreciate that the safety and consideration of all of the children

coming to Branch is really our highest priority, so we thank you for understanding the importance of notifying us of your child's plans.

- 4. School Recommendations for Private School Admission:** A fee of \$25 will be charged for each school recommendation for a Day School student written during the private school admission process. The cost will be invoiced to your child's Branch Billing account after the recommendation is requested during the season of enrollment.

Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

The Branch Academy opens its doors to all students at 8:00AM. We encourage all of our students to arrive by 8:30AM so that they may engage in our morning routine that follows the school-wide reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance between 8:35-45AM. If your child is going to be later than 8:45AM or absent, we ask that you send an email or text message to 813-391-6868.

All student drop off and pick up will be held on the east side of the property (where the drive goes around the playground). We are usually outside at the gate by 8:15AM (any "early birds" who might arrive between 8:00-8:15AM, may be walked up by a parent or caregiver to the door). After that time, we ask that you come through the drive thru line and drop students off with our "Gatekeepers". Our staff will sign your child in. We will make this as convenient as possible so that your child may start his or her day and so you may continue out of the drive as quickly as possible.

Important Carpool Reminders: For your safety and the safety of the students, and in order to ensure a timely carpool experience for all, please follow the carpool rules set out below. **Please also share these rules with anyone who will be dropping off or picking up your child at Branch.**

Please -

1. Follow the North to South traffic pattern in the alley at all times; if, for whatever reason, you have entered from Azele Street, please yield to those parents who have followed the requested formation.
2. **DO NOT unload or load any children in the alley;**
3. **Pull all the way forward in the drive thru circle so that the maximum number of cars can fit behind you;**
4. **AM Drop off:** 8:00-8:15 If we have not come outside yet, please walk your child to the gate and watch them go in/be greeted by a staff member. We are not permitted for

children to be engaged on the playground unless a staff member is present. If students and staff are already on the playground, **please wait for a staff member to connect with you and escort your child to the gate because a child must be with an adult at all times.**

5. **Pick up:** Wait until you are **within our drive** (if everyone pulls up, usually 3-4 cars will fit in this area at a time), please get out of your car and approach the gate. We will have you sign your child out. You can greet and walk your child back to your vehicle to load and secure them into their car seat.
6. If you would like to park in the neighborhood and walk your child to school or pick him or her up at the gate, you are welcome to do so.

The Branch Academy has multiple dismissal times:

Please be respectful of our students and staff who are transitioning at each of these parts of our daily schedule.

Half Day Students: 12:00 Noon

Full Day Students: 2:30 PM - 2:55 PM (1:30 PM –1:55 PM on Monday)

After the Bell Students: No later than 5:30 PM

Half Day students will be walked outside to the steps at noon to meet you at the playground gate. Because we have a smaller number of students to dismiss at noon, we ask that the first four cars park in the pick-up lane and walk to the gate to sign your child out. If you are the first car, please pull all the way forward in the drive, **if you are not inside the last palm tree of the drive, please wait until the first cars load so that your child is not in the ally at any time during dismissal.**

On RAINY DAYS, for drop-off and pick-up, you will need to park and come up to the door of the building to drop off or pick up your child.

Even though we are a small preschool, we do want to be considerate regarding traffic flow in the area since we share arrival and dismissal times with Mitchell Elementary, our neighboring elementary school. We enjoy having family presence at school during the day and would love for you to join us as a volunteer (see your child’s teacher to discuss needs and times). However, it is really best for the children, staff and transportation safety and efficiency if you do not linger at arrival and dismissal. Please respect the need for ongoing supervision of the children, and know that your child’s teacher will not be available to conference at this time. In addition, due to liability, any child not enrolled in the school should not be engaged on our playground at

any time, especially during the arrival and dismissal time. We want to ensure the security of each child and that our time with him or her begins and ends as smoothly as possible!

We are aware that the City of Tampa's designated traffic plan for our school, **which we have asked everyone to follow at all times**, may require that, particularly in the afternoon, you wait for a few moments on Bungalow Park or Platt Street due to Mitchell's carpool pick-up line. As this is the City's plan for our property, we simply ask that you plan accordingly.

It is very important that you share both the North to South traffic pattern (for drop-off and pick-up) and the late pick-up policy with anyone who brings your child to school or picks him or her up from school (i.e., grandparents, sitters, friends, etc.).

Our surrounding neighbors have been extremely supportive of our school. Please help us show the same consideration **by not blocking the alleyway at any time**, not parking behind or too close to anyone's driveway, and not blocking a mailbox. **Please yield to any neighbors trying to enter or exit a parking spot or driveway.**

We must have your authorization if someone other than a parent or previously approved individual needs to pick up your child. We will accept a text message to (813) 391-6868, phone call or written note in your child's folder on the day of play dates or other special circumstances. If we have not received a written notice or a phone call directly from you, we will not release your child in a manner not previously approved. If the person coming to pick up your child is not known to The Branch staff, we will require proper identification.

We do use our school time right up until dismissal, but we understand that there will be times when you may need to pick up your child prior to that time. If you know in advance that you need to pick up your child early, please let us know so that we can have everything ready for you when you arrive.

*****Please see attached map for directions in flow of traffic on property and surrounding block** and please make us aware of any issues you may experience while following these procedures.

Branch Daily Schedule

Pre-K3 Daily Schedule:

8:00-8:15	Early Bird Drop Off in Classroom
8:15-8:45	Arrival and Drop Off on Playground
8:45	Branch Bell / Pledge of Allegiance
8:45-9:15	Classroom Morning Meeting / Large Group: Morning Jobs, Calendar, Weather, I-Care Rules, Music & Movement
9:15-9:45	Story Time/Activity related to Literature
9:45-10:05 10:05-10:15	Snack/Transition with Books
10:15-10:45	PE / Outside Play
10:45-11:40	Centers/Small Group activity
11:40-12:00	Clean Up / Large Group: Review Center Work, Music & Movement, Announcements
12:00	Noon Dismissal
12:00-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:30	Rest
1:30-2:15	Centers / Small Group Activity
2:15-2:30	Clean Up / Pack up / Announcements
2:30-2:55	Playground / Dismissal (1:30 Early Release Mondays)
3:00	After the Bell Begins
(2:00-Mon.	ATB begins on Early Release)

Pre-K Daily Schedule:

8:00-8:15	Early Bird Drop Off in Classroom
8:15-8:45	Arrival and Drop Off on Playground
8:45	Branch Bell / Pledge of Allegiance
8:45-9:25	Classroom Morning Meeting / Large Group: Morning Jobs, Calendar, Weather, I-Care Rules, Music & Movement
9:25-9:50	Story Time
9:45-10:00	Snack
10:00-10:30 10:30-11:00	Small Group: Activity Related to Literature/Outside Play PreK Group1
10:00-10:30 10:30-11:00	Outside Play/Small Group: Activity Related to Literature PreK Group 2
11:00-11:50 11:50-12:00	Centers Clean Up / Large Group: Review Center Work, Explain Homework, Announcements
12:00	Noon Dismissal
12:00-12:30	Lunch
12:30-1:30	Rest
1:30-2:15	Centers / Small Group Activity
2:15-2:30	Clean Up / Pack up / Announcements
2:30-2:55	Playground / Dismissal (1:30 Early Release Mondays)
3:00	After the Bell Begins
(2:00-Monday	ATB begins on Early Release)

After the Bell Daily Schedule:

2:40	Pick up at Mitchell Elementary (1:40 Early Release Mondays, followed by Enrichment Activity 2:00-3:00)
3:00	Snack time
3:20	Playground
4:00	Homework Help/Centers/Enrichment Class of the Day
5:00	Playground/Begin Dismissal
5:30	Final Pick-up

Discipline

In our classrooms, we use a “Stop Light” behavior system. In this system, each child’s name is written on a car and then placed on the “Green Light” area of a big stoplight that is hanging in the classroom. If a student breaks a rule, he or she will first be given a “verbal warning” and a reminder of the rule that is being broken, a repeat of the same choice will result in his or her car being moved to the “warning section” of the stoplight chart. If a student breaks a rule again, his or her car will be moved to the “Yellow Light” area. Moving a car to the “Red Light” area is reserved for extreme misbehavior related to physical harm/safety to self or others and is accompanied by a call home.

Whenever your child is on something other than a green light at the end of the day, a communication will be in his or her folder to indicate why his or her car was moved off of the “Green Light.” The social and emotional well-being and growth of our students is a critical component of our school. We focus on positive reinforcement, and we work daily with our children on making “good choices.”

The children usually catch on very quickly to this system since they are used to seeing stoplights when their parents are driving in the car. They understand:

- Green – “go” ahead with good behavior
- Yellow – “slow” down and remember the classroom rules
- Red - “stop” the behavior that is breaking the rules

The children will be very proud of themselves for their “Green Light” days. Please see your child’s teacher if you have any questions about our behavior system.

The following classroom I Care rules help cultivate the understanding and practice of “good choices,” and the positive phrasing is easily incorporated into our daily routine:

Branch Academy I-CARE RULES:

1. We **LISTEN** to each other and our teachers;
2. Our **hands are for HELPING**, not hurting;
3. We use **I Care LANGUAGE** like “Please,” “Thank you,” “I’m sorry,” and “May I please have that when you are finished?” “Would you like to play with me?”;
4. We **care** about each other’s **FEELINGS**; and
5. We are **RESPONSIBLE** for what we **do and say**... so if I make a mess, I will clean it up. If I make a promise, I will keep it.

The following is considered unacceptable behavior:

- Running in the school
- Leaving the area or group without permission
- Becoming disruptive in the classroom
- Deliberate disobedience to staff direction
- Throwing toys, rocks, sand
- Using toys and materials inappropriately
- Aggressive behavior
- Abusive, or inappropriate language
- Arguing with team members or other children
- Lack of cooperation
- Behavior determined by the director to be unacceptable
- Hurting themselves or others, such as hitting, biting, spitting, kicking, and pulling hair

Our staff has these prime responsibilities when dealing with inappropriate behavior:

1. **Redirection** – To encourage a child’s good behavior and/or redirect his or her activity.
 - a. **“Think Time”**- To provide within the student’s area
 - b. One minute per year of age, no more than five minutes after the child has regained control or composure.
 - c. “Think Time” shall be defined as an area away from the group or activity yet within their area of work or play. (If a problem continues to exist, the child is then removed from the area.)
 - d. The child will be allowed to return to the group as soon as possible.

- e. The teacher will not only decide if the child is ready to return, but will encourage him/her to be ready.
- f. If a problem continues to exist, the child is then removed from the area.
- g. If redirection and “Think Time” periods are not sufficient, staff members intervene as soon as possible to prevent physical or emotional injury.
- h. After any instance, the teacher will try to help the child identify his/her unacceptable behavior and possible alternatives to use in the future.

Termination of Enrollment

We assume that when a child is registered, it is for the entire school year. If withdrawal becomes necessary, a thirty day advance notice must be given to the Director in writing. Any month or part of a month in which the child has attended is not eligible for a refund. Both parents/guardians agree that they are responsible for the entire tuition, and other fees as specified in the Parent Handbook, for the full academic year. Full payment of the entire annual tuition, or balance thereof, is required if the child withdraws from the school subsequent to submission of the Enrollment Form and payment of the first month’s non-refundable tuition. However, if a child must withdraw subsequent to submission of the Enrollment Form, the child’s family will be relieved of its financial obligations to the extent that The Branch Academy is able to replace the child with another who assumes the leaving family's financial obligations. Every effort will be made by Branch to find a replacement for the withdrawing child. Otherwise there will be no refund, credit or reduction for withdrawal, absences, vacations, illnesses, holidays or moving.

Discharge Policy

The Branch Academy reserves the right to drop or terminate service, after consultations with parents/guardians, when the welfare of the child or group would make this advisable. Reasons for termination may include but are not limited to:

1. Lack of parental cooperation with respect to Branch Academy policies;
2. Non-payment of fees;
3. Continual late pick up; or
4. Excessive hitting, biting, disrespect for authority, or continued disruption in the classroom that has not been resolved to the satisfaction of the Director.

If a child is asked to leave or withdraw from Branch, the parents of the student are responsible for the annual tuition amount, or balance thereof, as set forth in the section of this Handbook on Termination of Enrollment.

Immunization and Medical Exam Forms

It is a Childcare Licensing and Health Department regulation that records be kept of your child's immunization status. In addition, we must have written proof of your child's current physical examination. You will be asked to provide this before your child begins school. The regulation further requires that we have **original** health and shot records on file; we cannot accept a copy of these forms. Your child's pediatrician will supply these forms for you. Also, please make sure to fill out and keep a current copy of your child's medical information form on file. **It is your responsibility to note the expiration of your child's shot and exam records and to ensure that there is always an up to date form on file at school. Please understand that in order to comply with our licensing standards. Your child may not attend class at The Branch Academy if his or her records have expired.**

Health and Safety

There is direct link between a child's health and his or her ability to learn. Therefore, when you enroll your child we ask for information about your child's well-being. It is also important to tell us of any changes to your child's health. This information will be kept confidential. Your child's teacher will help you contact specialists in early childhood care (for example, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, etc.) should the need arise for additional support and advice.

Child Abuse and Neglect

In our role as a “safe” person for children, we are legally required to report any suspected case of child neglect or abuse. If a staff member suspects a child is being abused, she will notify the Director, and the Director will contact the Department of Children and Families Hot Line.

Sickness

In all instances, please allow your child a full 24 hours of recovery, without fever or other symptoms, before returning to school. **We thank you in advance for following our sick child rules which will assist in keeping all of our students and staff healthy.**

Our staff will do everything we can to comfort a child who becomes sick while at school. We will contact you to pick up your child in the event that any of these symptoms are evident. If we cannot reach you, we will attempt to contact the person listed on your child’s emergency form. Please DO NOT send your child to school if he or she has any of these symptoms:

- Vomiting or diarrhea within the past 24 hours
- Fever within the past 24 hours
- Sore/red throat
- Persistent coughing or sneezing
- Red, watery, swollen or discharging eye(s)
- Rash
- Earache, drainage from ear
- Excessive mucus from nose (runny nose), particularly opaque or greenish-yellow mucus
- Irritability, unusual fatigue or lethargy

No child will be admitted with skin rash or inflamed eyes without a physician’s note stating that the child’s condition is not communicable. These guidelines are for the welfare of all of our children. In order to provide a safe and healthy we rely on our parents to monitor their children with these guidelines in mind. Outdoor play is essential to your child’s development. We feel that if your child is too sick to play outdoors then they are too sick for group care. A child that is ill or has a temperature should be kept at home. All children shall have direct contact with a staff member upon arrival for early detection of apparent illness, communicable disease, or unusual condition or behavior.

Medication

1. An “Authorization to Give Medication” form, filled out in its entirety, must accompany all medication received by The Branch Academy
2. All medication must be in its original bottle or container.
3. All non-prescription medication must be labeled with the child’s first and last name and the date that it was received.
4. Non-prescription medication requiring administration for longer than one week must have a doctor’s note approving the length of use. That note may be good for a maximum of six months.
5. Long term prescription medication must have an “Authorization to Give Medication” form. This form must be updated every 30 days. We must have a doctor’s note for all prescription medications, with the medication not to exceed six months.

Classroom Volunteers

Some of the dates on our calendar will be days when we could really use your help with an activity. We will generally need no more than two volunteers for these days. If you are interested in volunteering in the classroom during the school year, please let your child’s teacher know. Your child’s teacher will reach out to you to see if you are available for a particular volunteer opportunity and will let you know the specific time that your help is needed in the classroom. In order to assist those children who may have some separation and/or adjustment issues, we ask that all of our parents limit their presence in the building if they know this will upset their child. We are happy to help work on the opportunity as the year progresses.

Separation Issues

The staff at Branch will always have your child’s emotional well-being as a primary concern. It is very normal, especially in the first few days of school, for your child to cling or even cry at the moment of separation. This indicates that your child has a strong emotional bond with you, and it is not an indication that your child is not adjusting or does not like school. We will work with you through any adjustment issues that arise, and we will support your child as he or she becomes accustomed to the routine of school. If your child cries or otherwise resists separation

from you, the best thing that you can do is to calmly express positive expectations for the day at school. Our teachers will take your child, acknowledge his or her feelings, comfort your child, and direct his or her attention to something of interest. A quick goodbye from you, with assurances that you'll see your child soon, is really the best course of action. Most of the time, your child will settle down and become engaged with friends and activities very quickly. If there is ever a bigger problem with adjustment, we will let you know. You are always welcome to call later in the morning to check on your child.

Curriculum Extras

We create and send home a monthly calendar that includes many of the activities that we will be doing throughout the month. We begin the school year by focusing on "Getting to Know Each Other". Then we move into our weekly alphabet themes.

Alphabet Weeks: During our "Journey through the Alphabet", we study and explore each letter; which consists of the formation of the letter as well as the sound. Almost every activity done in the classroom will reinforce the letter of the week. This helps us structure the many enriching activities we have planned for the school year. For example, "A" week may include activities such as graphing the colors of apples, painting the inside of an apple to make an apple print, making a special apple snack, and playing with airplanes.

Show and Tell Days: Show and Tell days will provide an opportunity for your child to bring an item from home and to talk about it with his or her classmates. We ask that your child bring special items only on Show and Tell Day. Show and Tell days will be specified on the monthly calendar and the show and tell items will generally be something that begins with the weekly letter or theme (ex. "B" week: a bear, a favorite ball, etc.). We ask that your child bring only one Show and Tell item, and that the item be of a size that **fits comfortably** in your child's zipped backpack. This will help foster the independence of being able to easily pack it back up instead of the item getting left behind at school.

Toys from Home

As stated above, toys from home are limited to the weekly Show and Tell item that begins with the letter of the week. Your child's toy, on that day, will be incorporated into the curriculum. We are blessed to have a wonderful assortment of age appropriate toys and educational items in each of our classrooms. **We do not want your child's special items to get lost or broken while at school.** Additionally, it is very difficult for the teachers when personal belongings become a distraction and affect your child's focus on the lesson plan for the day. We have found that play/costume jewelry and large oversized watches can be a distraction and possible safety hazard to our students. For that reason, we ask that these items be limited to use at home. If your child is wearing something that becomes a distraction or choking hazard, we will place it in his or her backpack to go home at the end of the day. No toy weapons, or anything considered to be a weapon, are allowed at school at any time.

Birthdays

We do value the importance of this very special day in your child's life and we have a Branch tradition of recognizing students on (or the closest school day to) his or her birthday with our special songs, music, books, etc. All the children "ice" birthday cake pages for bell work and we sing. The student is also presented with a birthday book that they keep as a gift from Branch Academy. We ask that you do not bring in cakes/cupcakes or other sweet treats, or fast food, and that you do not send "goodie bags" for the students. We often have multiple birthdays celebrated in a month or even in one week and it gets to be too much for the students. Summer birthdays will be recognized at the end of the school year. If every student in your child's class is invited to a birthday party, (or if all the girls or all the boys are included), we will distribute the invitation envelopes in our communication folders.

Snack and Lunch

The Branch Academy is committed to health and wellness for all children. We encourage and help children learn about and enjoy eating healthy and nutritious foods. We will have lunch every day at noon. There will also be snack time during each morning and afternoon session. Since mealtimes are an ideal time to talk about nutrition, parents are encouraged to send children with snacks and lunches that are healthy and nutritious. In fact, childcare licensing requires that every parent sign a Nutrition Form at the beginning of the school year that is your agreement to pack a healthy, nutritious snack and lunch for your child. This form is always provided as part of your child's First Day Packet.

Please pack and label lunch and snack(s) separately.

We do separate these bags at the start of the school day, so please help by packing two separate containers for snack and lunch. **Students may bring one water bottle, labeled with their name, to use with all meal times as we have a cold filtered water fountain provided for refills. It is also certainly an option to pack a water bottle and/or white milk with each food container/pouch/bag but those are the only permissible drinks to have on campus. Please see details below:**

Snack: All students need to bring a small, healthy snack and a drink for snack time. (Please **no candy** or whole packages cookies, etc.) For example: cheese crackers, granola bars, cheese sticks, goldfish, yogurt, pretzels, grapes or other fruit, etc. We ask that you pack a separate reusable bag/ small lunchbox with your child's snack. If your child stays for After the Bell, he or she should have snacks marked "AM" and "PM"/"ATB". Even if just in a brown bag this system works well to keep the students organized and eating the portions designated for each time.

We also request that you **do not** send yogurt in a tube ("Go-GURT"). We encourage independence, but the yogurt tubes are frustratingly hard to open. A child's attempt to open the tube often results in a yogurt mess that requires a complete change of clothes for that child and for the student sitting next to him or her. In addition, once opened, the tube cannot be put down. You are welcome to send drinkable yogurt (with a straw) or a yogurt cup that is eaten with a spoon.

Drinks: The Nutrition Form also asks that your **child's drink consist of water or white milk only.** It is a licensing requirement that any drink sent to school must be **labeled with your child's name.** Please label re-usable water bottles or even **if you are sending a plastic water bottle (i.e., Zephyrhills, Publix, Nestle), please write your child's name on that bottle.** We are happy to help refill these bottles at our water fountains. The children quickly become able to do this on their own.

Lunch: A traditional lunch box works well. Please remember to pack and label lunch **separately.** This makes things less confusing for your child, especially at the beginning of the school year, and promotes the independence we will encourage. We do ask that you **please** refrain from sending or dropping off "fast food" from a restaurant to school.

Utensils: Please pack any utensils that your child will need for snack and lunch. We do keep a back-up supply of these items, but we have limited storage space, and our supply runs out quickly if we provide multiple utensils on a daily basis. We are happy to wash and return any utensils **LABELED** with your family's name that come to school.

At both snack and lunch time, the students are looking to re-fuel their bodies, and multi-packs/bags of cookies, fruit roll-ups, and candy will not serve the intended purpose. If you do include a less nutritious food item, we ask that you pair it with something that would fall within the healthy food choices of the USDA's "MyPlate" guidelines (i.e. please pair chips with fruit, or send a granola bar to go with fruit gummy snacks). While we would prefer that you try to send only healthy food items, the occasional treat is not a problem. However, if you would like to pack a dessert for your child, please make it something small (i.e., open a multi-pack and send only one or two cookies), and **please note that we ask for no candy at any time.** If a small candy bar is included with a "Lunchable" type box, we will send it home for an "after school snack".

The students eat what you send, and the choices that you make are preparing them for the choices that they will eventually make for themselves. You may be amazed at what healthy items your child will eat. Thank you so much for your support of this part of our mission!

Branch Academy Uniform Policy

We do ask that our students wear a uniform to school. Our staff has experienced first-hand how beneficial having a uniform policy can be. Certain clothing and accessories can become very distracting during the school day and we feel that following our guidelines will also keep any favorite wardrobe items free of potential stains from paint and/or other messy supplies used during artistic, sensory or outdoor play times. Our hope is that by making uniforms affordable and easily accessible, we will help simplify your mornings, school shopping, and laundry!

Our uniform consists of “**comfortable clothes and closed toe shoes**” which allow for play, running, jumping, or other physical activity:

Our CORE items include a solid NAVY (or green embroidered Branch Academy polo top which our families have an opportunity to order each year in August) and a KHAKI bottom. Girls may wear navy or khaki jumpers or dresses. (A white shirt can be worn underneath) These items can be found at Target, Old Navy, Children’s Place, Gap Kids, WalMart, or online at Land’s End, etc.

SOLID Navy Tops — most frequently found with a collar but may have a crew neck. FRIDAY SPIRIT TEES can be worn with a khaki, green, brown or denim bottom. We are very flexible with the bottoms worn with this tee as long as our students wear their Friday spirit.

Navy Sweatshirt or Sweater –We do encourage our students to wear a navy sweatshirt or sweater when possible. These items can also be found in the uniform sections when shopping for everyday clothing items. (Any color heavy coat is fine for the few days during the year when one is actually needed). We usually place an order in August for Branch Academy logo sweatshirts should you want to purchase one of those for the cooler months.

Khaki Bottoms— shorts, skorts, and pants. PLEASE purchase an elastic waistband when possible for convenience during bathroom times. We strongly request that you do not send your child with belts or difficult buttons/buckles. We encourage you to check with your child and make sure that he or she can easily handle his or her pant closures.

Shoes -

1. **Closed-toe/Rubber sole**
2. **No “light up” features please**
3. **Shoelaces that are not “so slick” that they come untied often** even after frequent double knots. We are so happy to help your child learn to tie his/her shoes, but laces that will not stay tied are unsafe.

Change of Clothes

Please send in a change of clothes in the large baggie provided by Branch. Please include underwear, a shirt, a pair of shorts and a pair of socks. This bag will stay at school in your child’s bathroom cubby in case of spills or accidents. Should the staff need to provide your child with the extra uniform, the soiled clothes will be sent home for laundering or disposal. Please make sure to replace the clothes the following day so that we can put them back in your child’s bathroom cubby. In addition, you may also want to consider sending in additional pieces for seasonal and size changes.

School Supplies

On the **first day of school**, all students should bring these items labeled with his/her name:

Backpack: We recommend a mid to full size backpack since a full-sized folder needs to fit comfortably inside (without having to fold it over) for daily communication and completed projects. We find that having the opportunity for all belongings to fit inside the students’ backpacks keeps them together when the students are coming and going from the building. Especially during dismissal, it is helpful to carry empty lunchboxes and water bottles, etc. inside the backpack so that nothing gets left behind. The children enjoy “packing and unpacking” their own belongings.

Snack and Lunch Bags/Boxes: Please also see full details on separate document: “Snack and Lunch”.

- **All Students:**

*Snack Bag/Box/Container -This can be a paper bag, a reusable pouch, a plastic container or a small sized lunchbox.

Please Note: Your child may bring a labeled, reusable water bottle for snack, and we will help him or her refill the bottle from our water fountain for lunch.

- **For Pre-K / Pre-K3 students staying for Lunch:**

*Lunchbox - Filled with a nutritious lunch 😊 Please see our notes on healthy eating. Drink should be a labeled container of water or milk. A frozen ice pack does a great job keeping things cold until noon.

IMPORTANT: Packing the children’s lunch and snack separately helps foster independence right from the beginning of the year, and helps minimize confusion when it is time to place snack and lunch in their designated areas. We do separate these bags at the start of the school day, **so please help by packing two separate containers for snack and lunch.**

- **After-the-Bell Students:**

*PM Snack – Please label a “PM,” “ATB” or “Bell” Snack for our 3:00 After-the-Bell snack time with another drink and food item(s). We will help fill any reusable water bottles again for this snack time.

Extra set of Clothes Bag: A personalized Branch gallon baggy will be sent home during the “Meet and Greet” social with contents listed.

Basic School Supplies:

The Branch Academy **purchases all of the basic school supplies for our students.**

However, if your child enjoys Back-to-School shopping (or if a sibling is working on “a supply list” and your Branch student would like to also participate 😊), the following items are 100% **optional**. Since some items are brand specific, it is nice to take advantage of sale pricing this time of year and we would always appreciate the donations:

- 1 box of 10 ct. **Crayola Classic** colored markers
- 1 large Elmer’s **white** colored glue sticks
- 1 single set of **Crayola watercolors**
- 1 4oz. bottle of **Elmer’s** glue
- 1 box of **Crayola** colored pencils

In general: Please LABEL personal belongings 😊

Please make sure to label the items your child brings to school. **Labeling helps the staff to guide each child in keeping track of his or her belongings.** If you send a bag or container for snack or lunch, please make sure it has a name, and please make sure that all backpacks and lunchboxes are labeled as well. Having names on the outside really does help make a difference. You can label your child's backpack/lunchbox with a **luggage tag, monogram or sharpie.** We have some popular styles that look alike and this can cause confusion when the backpacks do not have a name. If your child ever brings a jacket, a sweater, or a hat, please put his or her name inside. Any optional school supplies brought in should not be labeled as they will be shared within the classroom.

Nap Time

We believe that children need a balance of activities that include large motor and active play as well as structured quiet time. It is our philosophy that students who attend our school need adequate quiet time and or rest, as a part of their daily routine. Since all the children are constantly engaged in stimulating activity, we require that everyone rest on cots after lunch. Realizing each child's rest needs are different, we try to offer alternative ways of resting by providing soft music, stories, etc. for those who choose not to sleep.

Nap Time is not just about sleeping, since some students really need to sleep and others benefit from having quality peaceful time resting their bodies. At the end of the nap period the students will transition to centers. Branch provides cots for all of our students and it is the only item used for rest time; No blankets, towels or other items should be brought from home.

Smoke-Free Zone

Our school is a smoke-free zone. Thank you for not smoking on our campus.

Emergency and Evacuation Procedures

Fire Drill Procedure

From the first month of school, we gather the children together and talk with them about fire safety and why we practice for a fire. We discuss our “Safe Spot” out by our big grandfather oak and reassure them that we are safe there. We also let them know that if we could not go out the front door, we would exit the building by the Gomez Street door (the “back” door). The following procedures are followed:

- We explain to the children that **each month** we practice by pretending that there is a fire.
- We have the children line up quickly and calmly at the door, making sure that they go with a teacher to escort them.
- Teacher takes a telephone, attendance sheets, Emergency Contact lists and First Aid Kit.
- Staff member notes the times the fire drill begins and ends.
- We walk the children back through the exit door from our “Safe Spot” and congratulate the children for a job well done.

Evacuation / Emergency Contingency Plan

In the event of an emergency requiring evacuation from the school (due to fire, natural disaster, loss of power, heat, or water, or other emergency), the following procedures shall be followed:

- In case of fire, the director will call 911. Teachers will calmly gather and count the children and leave from the designated exit. The Director will recount the children and compare to the day’s attendance to ensure that all children are present and accounted for. Teachers will take children to the designated safe spot which is on the other side of our grandfather oak, lined up along the fence. The director will exit the building with emergency phone numbers and once all are safe, begin contacting parents.
- In the event of power, heat, or water loss, or other emergency the director will contact children’s parents to have them picked up early.
- In the event that it is not safe to stay on the premises, the preschoolers will be evacuated to Mitchell Elementary School next door. The director and teachers will walk them via the sidewalk on Gomez Street. The director and staff will contact parents.

Hurricane

The Branch Academy follows the School District of Hillsborough County with regard to weather related school closings or preparedness. We also follow their lead with any possible make up days. Families should stay tuned to local weather related news reports and will be informed via email from the school to confirm information.

Tornado or Lockdown

We have been fortunate that this occurrence has never taken place at our school. However, we practice the “See How Many Students Can fit into Branch Bathrooms Game”! The children happily respond by going into their designated bathroom when directed to this procedure even though they don’t fully understand the serious reason for the activity. However, we feel comfortable that should we need to implement this practice in an urgent situation, our students would respond appropriately.

This type of procedure provides safety for students and staff if ever a tornado or weapon related violence should take place. The purpose is to put barriers between the staff and students and any possible threat. See below for procedures that would be followed:

- The staff would quickly gather the children in bathrooms off the Leaf Room and bring the attendance sheets, phone, emergency lists and book bag.
- All doors would be locked and/or barricaded by furniture.
- This would obviously be stressful for all involved and so we have a prepared emergency bag that has books, etc. for children to participate in a quiet activity to help distract them.
- Staff and children would remain in this area until notified by Director, Police or Fire Department that it is safe to return to the classrooms. The Director would be in touch with families to inform them of the incident.

We thank all of our parents in advance for providing the school with the best possible way to be contacted. Please be ensured that your child’s safety is the absolute top priority while they are in our care. We take the responsibility of caring for our school family very seriously.

Conferences

Conferences will be available twice a year, but if you ever have a concern, or feel the need to meet with your child's teacher, we will schedule something immediately. Please e-mail the school and we will get back to you as soon as possible. We are always available to discuss concerns regarding your child's progress and development.



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PARENTS SIGNED AGREEMENT

(Please **keep this copy** for your records)

It is asked that both parents, if applicable, or legal guardians sign this page and return it in your child's folder.

This document acknowledges that each of the parents below has read The Branch Academy Parent Handbook in full, understands and agrees to make a sincere effort to comply with the rules and regulations set forth.

Child's Name: _____

Parent Signature

Date

Parent Signature

Date



PARENTS SIGNED AGREEMENT

The Parent Handbook has been emailed to the address requested in our records. For your convenience, we are sending this form home in your child's folder.

Please **sign and return it to school.**

The final copy will be placed in your child's student file.

It is asked that both parents, if applicable, or legal guardians sign this page and return it in your child's folder.

This document acknowledges that each of the parents below has read The Branch Academy Parent Handbook in full, understands and agrees to make a sincere effort to comply with the rules and regulations set forth.

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