

First Discoveries



Parent Newsletter March 22, 2020

Dear Families,

We hope that you are staying well and taking care of yourself and your family during all this uncertainty. This health crisis has been tough for everyone in the community, and we know that each of our families is affected on a daily basis.

NAEYC and the CDC continue to recommend limiting group care to reduce the transmission of the virus. At the same time, they both acknowledge that childcare plays a critical role, allowing those in essential positions to report to work.

In keeping with their recommendations, we will continue to be open on a limited basis:

- No VPK classes or part-day preschool classes at either location (including lunch time pick-up and 3:00 pm pick-up)
- No Kindergarten-Primary class meetings at our Brandon location
- Open 7:30 am to 5:00 pm
- Choice of schedule: Mon-Fri, Mon/Wed/Fri or Tues/Thurs

The earliest date we would return to normal operations is Thursday, April 16th, in keeping with the closures of Hillsborough County Public Schools. However, our partial closure could in fact be longer than this, based on what we are seeing in other parts of the country.

We still recommend that if your family has alternative options for childcare that you use those options rather than bringing your child to school. This will help us keep group sizes very low while protecting your child and your family's health.

I hope that this newsletter answers many of your questions, but please do not hesitate to reach out to us with any questions or concerns. We are all in this together, and we appreciate your continued support!

Wishing everyone in our school family well,

Ms. Cindy

Living our Values, Even in Difficult Times

Over the next few weeks, and until the health crisis is resolved, our goals are:

- To care for each member of our school family, including children, families, and staff members.
- To contribute to the health of our community by following all CDC and health department guidelines so that we can help protect our most vulnerable citizens, including the elderly and those with underlying health conditions.
- To use all available resources to ensure that our school is able to serve families when everyone is ready to return to work.



Ms. Keeli recording a story time as we prepare for our distance learning activities!



Our emergency closing policy states that tuition is still due when the school is closed. Therefore, tuition paid in March will not be refunded as those funds were used for payroll costs so that our teachers could receive regular paychecks in March.

Given the extraordinary nature of this extended emergency, effective April 1st, families will have several option related to tuition.

Please see the next page for more details.

Tuition During the Partial Closure

In terms of tuition payments, we feel it is important for you to do what is best for your family, and we will outline the options regarding how to proceed with tuition payments. However, we also want to make sure that you understand the finances of the school before making decisions.

At First Discoveries, almost every dollar paid in tuition goes directly toward paying our teachers and staff. Everything else required to operate the schools (rent/mortgage, maintenance, utilities, classroom materials, insurance, etc.) is paid for via our other sources of revenue (VPK/School Readiness funding, Child Care Food Program, etc.).

All of our families have already paid their March tuition, and this funding was used to pay two payroll cycles for our teachers and other staff members. Up through Friday, March 20th, all staff members worked regular schedules and received regular salary. Last week, with our classroom attendance so low, we used our own staff to complete thorough deep cleaning at both locations. This allowed us to ensure that the environment is as healthy as possible while also allowing staff to work normal schedules.

Our goal going forward to is continue to offer regular work schedules for all staff members, which will include working in classrooms with the small numbers of children that are currently attending, helping with “distance learning” activities for children who are at home, and participating in professional development and curriculum training.

We do anticipate that some of our staff might have slightly reduced hours in the coming weeks, and we have already had some staff request sick leave under the new Families First legislation because of their health or their family members. Still, we know that our staff are depending on the school to care for their own families, and we are committed to doing all that we can to take care of them.

Many families have asked if there is anything they can do for our staff members at this time. Your well wishes this last week have meant a lot to them! Our staff care deeply about our school and each of our families.

To enable us to cover salaries next month, we will send out April invoices at their regularly scheduled time. All tuition collected during the month of April will be used to cover staff expenses. We very much want to retain our staff and have a viable school to come back to when we reopen. If you are able to pay some portion of your tuition, or all of your tuition if that works for your family, know that all of the tuition that you pay will go directly to your child’s teachers. As a thank you for supporting us during this time, we are offering a tuition credit for families (20% per month, applied to monthly tuition after we reopen).

We do intend to apply for all state, local and national programs that will provide emergency funding as well, but we are assuming that these programs will take some time to fund and we are budgeting accordingly.

Tuition Options for April

For children that are attending, tuition will be due on or before the first of the month.

- Tuition will be for full time care (Monday through Friday).
- Children ages two and up can also choose from a limited number of part-time spaces (Tues/Thurs or Mon/Wed/Fri).
- Regular tuition rates will apply.

For children that are staying at home, you have three choices:

- Pay full tuition and receive a future tuition credit
- Pay whatever portion of the tuition that is affordable for your family and receive a future tuition credit
- Cease payments for the time that we are closed

For those who pay tuition in April but do not attend, you will receive a tuition credit that will be credited back to you (20% per month for the five months after we reopen).

Family Attendance & Tuition Survey

Please take a moment to complete the new family survey that will let us know:

- Attendance for next week
- Attendance for next month
- Tuition for April

Here is the link:

<https://forms.gle/6TsFWND9hhUUVu5t9>

(Link sent via Brightwheel.)

Thank you for your assistance!

What if First Discoveries closes entirely?

First Discoveries will close entirely if local or state agencies require us to do so, or if we do not have enough staff that are healthy and available to care for children.

If either of these occur, we will create a tuition credit for families equal to the amount of unused tuition for that month. The credit will be applied to tuition at the rate of 20% per month when we reopen.

Home – School Connections

One of our goals is to continue to serve our children and families, even while we are apart. Our teachers are just beginning to launch our new Learning at Home program.

We will be using a few technologies that are new to our staff, including Facebook Live, Zoom, Seasaw and others. Please be patient as we experiment and figure out which works best for us!

Some of the things that you can look forward to include:

- Circle Time via Zoom (so children can interact with their friends and teachers)
- Distance learning activities for K/Primary and VPK
- Cooking with Kids
- Yoga for Kids with Ms. Jennifer
- Sign Language Fun with Ms. Keeli

If you have other ideas, or you would like to help out, please let us know! We are so excited about this opportunity to connect with each one of you ... and we know that we have lots to learn about using these platforms for early childhood!

Out of our 22 staff members, 3 have requested extended sick leave because they were at high risk for the virus. The remaining 19 staff members intend to be here to serve your family throughout this crisis!

Precautions We Are Taking During This Time

- Daily health assessments including temperature check (7:30 to 9:00 am). No late arrivals.
- Reduced class sizes and classroom furniture rearranged to encourage children to interact in small groups (modified social distancing that is age appropriate)
- Only one class on the playground at a time (modified social distancing)
- Meals in small groups with family style meals suspended at this time (teachers are serving food instead of having children pass bowls of food)
- No group water play activities or other wet sensory activities
- Deep cleaning completed at both locations last week
- On-going daily and weekly intensive cleaning at both locations
- Training and mentoring for our staff members

Reminder: Every child and staff member must participate in a health check each morning. Please plan to arrive between 7:30 and 9:00. Thank you!

From our staff
to each one of you,
wishing each member
of our School Family
well!

