



CHAMBLEE METHODIST KINDERGARTEN

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Dear Parents,

As November approaches, we begin a very special season of thankfulness. We will incorporate into our daily plans and activities the feeling of gratitude for our families, homes, churches, friends, food, and school. The children will learn about why we celebrate Thanksgiving and may experience sharing in a couple of ways: some classes may have special Thanksgiving snacks which they will help prepare, and everyone will attend a special Chapel when they may bring food to share with the needy (more about that on the next page). In addition, you will soon receive information about your individual conference with your child's teacher so that you may learn more about how your child spends his/her time when s/he is at school.

October was a busy month as we've welcomed autumn and prepared for Halloween. We especially enjoyed the opportunities to chat with many of you at Donuts for Dads in our 3's, 4's, and 5's classes. We had two Chapel times, so all of our students have had the opportunity to participate since the 2's classes are now coming. On behalf of our staff, we pray that you will have an enjoyable and meaningful Thanksgiving season with your families and friends. We are thankful for you and your children and for God's many blessings among our CMK family.

With Gratitude,

Upcoming Events

November 5 and 8 – Occupational Therapy screening (permission form needed)

Tuesday, November 6 – No School (Election Day)

Wednesday, November 7 – Chapel (bring canned goods)

Thursday, November 15 – Chapel (bring canned goods)

Thursday, November 15 – School closes at noon for staff meeting (no lunch bunch)

November 19- 23 – School Closed for Thanksgiving Holiday

November 27 and 28 - Speech and language screening (permission form needed)

Wednesday, December 5 – Chapel (bring a toy, game or puzzle to donate)

Thursday, December 6 – Noon closing for staff luncheon (no lunch bunch)

Monday, December 10 – Mr. Greg music show

Thursday, December 13 – Chapel (bring a toy, game or puzzle to donate)

Saturday, December 15 – CFUMC Breakfast with Santa; 8:30 am Fellowship Hall

Sunday, December 16 – CFUMC Live Nativity; 6:00 pm outside near the activity center

Tuesday, December 18 – last day of school before Christmas vacation (noon closing, no lunch bunch or enrichment classes)

NOVEMBER CHAPEL SERVICES: A TIME TO REMEMBER OTHERS

Our November Chapels are very special and meaningful services for us at CMK since these are the times that our children remember others who are in need. On November 7 and November 15, food barrels will be placed near the altar so that our students may bring canned goods or other non-perishable items for the needy at Thanksgiving time. These items will be sorted and distributed by CFUMC.

ALL canned and dried food items are gratefully accepted but suggested donations include: canola oil, sugar, flour, dried beans, rice, instant potatoes, canned meats, canned chicken (larger sizes), peanut butter, jelly, pastas, and pasta sauces (not glass jars). Regular-sized items enable greatest flexibility in packing food boxes. This annual Thanks for Giving food drive has been sponsored by Chamblee First United Methodist Church for many years and includes donations from local schools and Scout troops. Other opportunities to participate are to sort food donations (Thursday, Nov. 15 at 6 pm), basket packing (Saturday, Nov. 17 at 9 am), and basket delivery (Sunday, Nov. 18 following 11 am worship.) All ages welcome, supervision required for children.

ALUMNI SURVEY

You may be interested to know that we are send a survey to parents of children who were enrolled at CMK last year in either pre-k or kindergarten. The purpose of the survey is to receive feedback on the students' transition to their new school this year. The questions focus on the child's ease of adjustment to "big" school and readiness of all types (social, behavioral, reading, math, motor skills.) We are interested in knowing how well our students move into the next phase of their education. This is our 4th year to conduct this survey; we will use what we learn to determine if our school should adapt our curriculum in any way.

PARENT SURVEY RESPONSES

Every May at the end of the school year, our school sends to each family an evaluation form which gives parents an opportunity to rate CMK in several areas, including quality of care, instruction, classroom activities, and communication. Parents are also asked to comment on what they like best about our program and what they would like to see changed or improved. The responses we receive help us maintain and improve the quality of our program. We appreciate those who took time last spring to give us thoughtful comments; we heard from about 20% of our families, however we know many more families participated in the SACS survey that was sent out earlier in the year.

We do appreciate the responses we received and want you to know that each one was carefully read and considered. Some suggestions were taken to the Kindergarten Committee, while others are being reviewed by our staff. Your participation in parent surveys ensures that CMK will continue to provide an atmosphere of love and learning that allows each child to develop to his/her God-given potential. If you would like further conversation about any of your own specific remarks or suggestions, please feel free to contact Mellie.

Affirmations

The survey responses rated the overall quality of care, the cleanliness and appearance of the facility, the physical appearance of the classrooms and the quality of programming as excellent (92% - 96%) ALL Parents responded yes (100%) to these questions; Does your child enjoy school?, Are school activities age appropriate?, Do parents feel comfortable and welcome when visiting the school?, Are tuition rates reasonable and Have parents recommended our school to friends and neighbors? Here is a sampling of specific comments on the survey that validate these responses;

my child is known, cared for and loved as a person; this is by far the BEST school we have ever attended; the school is obviously well cared for since the hallways, bathrooms and classrooms are always clean and there is never trash on the playground; I fully support the simplicity of the program with no technology, just good old-fashioned learning through play and structure from teachers; my child comes home sharing new ideas and things he has learned. I appreciate the enrichment activities that don't require extra drop-offs or pick up, we also loved the magician, reptile wrangler, dentist and puppet show; CMK feels like a family and we love the way the teachers take the time to get to know so many of the children beyond those in their class; the teachers are phenomenal; I have recommended the program multiple times!

The survey showed that 84% of the respondents see the school's philosophy and mission statement as important factors. That was followed closely by our location, the tuition cost, the reputation of the school and recommendations from neighbors and friends and other important factors when choosing a preschool. Please know that we are dedicated to continuing our philosophy and mission and that tuition rates will remain competitive.

Communication

Most of our parents found that emails from the director (83%), emails from the teacher (75%) and the monthly paper newsletter (50%) are the most helpful methods of communication. There were several comments about the website and using that for announcements, etc. We have been working on updating our website and will evaluate its usefulness for announcements. It was also requested to send the monthly newsletter in email form. We will work toward doing this as well. Some concerns were raised about the inconsistency among teachers with communication so we will address that with the staff. We do try to put emails in bullet form rather than narrative form so that important information does not get overlooked. We also received some good feedback pertaining to parent/ teacher conferences. The staff has been working to revise our conference objectives and I hope you will find them to be useful and helpful as you gain insight into your child's day at school.

Suggestions for Improvement

Playground – Most respondents (76%) rated the overall quality of the playground and equipment as excellent with (24%) rating as good. There were comments about adding a shade structure, some balls, ribbons and chalk. Currently we have added balls and chalk (with teacher supervision) to our playgrounds and we are working with the Kindergarten committee to study the possibility of a shade structure on the upper playground. Using rubber instead of wood chips was also suggested and having explored that option we find that the rubber chips are cost prohibitive for our program.

Safety - Monitoring the main entrance to the church during carpool – We now have a teacher stationed in the main atrium each morning to make sure children do not head out the back portico door during arrival time.

Length of School day – Since our school is accredited based on a half day we are limited in what we can do. Also, we know that a longer day would be too much for some of our younger students, many of whom still nap. Since we do maintain consistent enrollment, it would appear that there is still a preference for a half-day program. Having the "lunch bunch" hour and the after school enrichment programs remaining optional seems to work for those children who are ready for a longer day. Starting earlier in the morning will pose a staffing issue since many of our teachers have school age children and lengthening the day in this way would lead to different licensing from the state which would compromise some of our school guidelines (scheduled teacher break times, feeding children more than a snack once per day, etc.)

Graduation for PreK students – This is an idea that the preK teachers will discuss. We haven't had a graduation for preK in the past because we do have a Kindergarten class and many of our preK students stay at CMK and attend that class. Therefore, a graduation from Kindergarten (the last age/grade level at our school) seems more appropriate.

Foreign Language after school program - Some studies of foreign language in early childhood classrooms indicate that offering instruction once a week for 30 -45 minutes does not have the benefits of longer or more frequent instruction. We have tried offering Spanish a couple of times as an afternoon enrichment class, but the children seemed too tired or disinterested in a 45-minute class that involved more cognitive skills at the end of their school day. By offering our students the opportunity to learn songs in several other languages in music class, they have some exposure to a foreign language.

More information on pre-learning skills and assessment – A couple of comments were noted about parents wanting more information about pre-learning skills and how they lead to skills needed in elementary school. We are working with the teachers to better communicate the necessary pre-learning skills and activities that are done in the classroom each day that help develop the skills necessary for elementary school learning. For example, working on fine motor skills by ripping paper, using tongs to grasp objects and pulling on socks help to develop the muscles needed to grip a pencil when making letters, using glue and coloring. In the area of assessment parents want to know more about the cognitive, social/emotional and physical development of their child. The staff development workshop that the teachers attended last month as well as meeting in age level groups are helping to establish objectives and standards to let parents know how their child is developing in these areas. Developing a consistent assessment program is a goal of CMK. This goal was identified by both the CMK staff and the SACS accreditation team. During parent/teacher conferences you may hear more about our current assessment tools.

Music Program – Each year several parents request the words to the songs that our children learn in music. Mrs. Weaver is working on that and hopes to include some lyrics to our most popular songs in the December newsletter.

Thank you all again for your responses to the May '16 survey; your opinions and feedback do make a difference! Please feel free to share your thoughts with us any time during the school year.

Parent information

Let Your Child Make Choices

Children need to learn how to make choices. Making choices helps them feel grown up and feel good about themselves. As children learn to do things for themselves, they will want to make some of their own decisions. Parents should encourage this:

- Give your child chances to make choices. Ask questions such as these: "Do you want to wear the red shirt or the yellow one? Do you want water or milk? Do you want to take the ball or the doll to Grandma's house?"
- At first, give simple choices. Open – ended choices can confuse your child. Ask, "Do you want a banana or cheese?" not "What do you want to eat?"
- Let your child make a choice only when you mean it. Don't ask, "Do you want to go to the grocery store with Daddy?" if your child has to go.

surveys included encouraging words of praise. Many parents described the staff as “friendly, loving, and nurturing” and noted the attention that the teachers pay to the children and to parent questions and concerns. Many parents commented on their child’s love of school and the communication they receive through e-mails, photos, and newsletters. Many parents like the sense of community at CMK, Chapel, the social skills that are reinforced, and the respect and kindness shown to the children by the staff. Many parents noticed the way all the teachers make an effort to learn every child’s name, not just those in one class. Many parents mentioned that their children are more confident and independent while learning a lot of self-help skills. We are pleased that 100% of the responses indicated that the children like coming to school and parents feel welcome when they visit. The overall quality of the programming and curriculum received a 98% approval rating. Parents approve of the age-appropriate learning activities and are glad that the children are not “pushed” to move ahead of their age-level. We especially appreciate knowing that virtually 99% of those who replied would recommend CMK to friends and neighbors.

Many parents like having both music and creative movement classes available for all classes, not just the older students, and are glad that all classes attend music twice a week. Parents commented on the low student-teacher ratios and the overall small size of the school. All of the parents who replied feel the tuition rates are reasonable. Some parents also like that the church includes the school families in many activities such as Fall Festival, Touch-a-truck, Christmas activities, the Easter Egg Hunt, etc. Many like the flexibility of Lunch Bunch.

We appreciate your encouragement so much; please know that we do not take it for granted.

Questions and Concerns

These concerns are the ones mentioned several times. If your concern is not included in the list below, please feel free to ask about your own remarks.

Can the school have longer hours?

Our school is not licensed for daycare so we are limited in what we can do. We

feel that a 4-hour day would be too much for our younger students, many of whom still nap. The cost would have to be increased as well. Since we do maintain consistent enrollment, it would appear that there is still a need or preference for a half-day program. Having the "lunch bunch" hour remain optional seems to work for most. Our kindergarten class does, of course, have longer hours; they stay until 2:15 several days per week since children over the age of 5 are exempt from the 4-hour limit.

Can the playgrounds be improved?

The survey showed that 67% of the responders think the playgrounds are excellent and 30% feel they are good. If anyone has a specific suggestion for improvements, please do let us know. We did not add new equipment during the summer this year since the playgrounds are both full; both are annually inspected by a licensed equipment installer to ensure safety. We did add a new climbing component on the big playground and are currently looking at adding a dome climber. On the small playground, we plan to make the sandbox larger. While some of the plastic components are prone to show dirt, we have them cleaned periodically. Commercial-grade equipment is very expensive, so as long as safety is not compromised, we tend to use our equipment as long as possible. We try to choose equipment that will allow children to use various motor skills, including climbing, while using both upper and lower-body muscles. We want to leave plenty of open spaces just for running since we use only our "indoor feet" while we're inside and need opportunities to use our running feet.

Why are staff meetings always on Thursdays, which cancels Lunch Bunch the same day every time?

We schedule staff meetings/professional development classes on Thursdays since that's the only day of the week (other than Fridays, when no one wants to stay late!) that does not have an afternoon enrichment class scheduled. Most staff teach on Thursdays as well.

Can the C.M.K. calendar be the same as the DeKalb school calendar?

Our calendars are similar since the majority of our families and teachers have children in the public schools in this area, but our calendars are not identical. For instance, we observe Good Friday in the spring. We also schedule our own professional development days once or twice a year so that we can have a full day of professional development with some classroom work time. We end school in May a day or two earlier than DeKalb to allow for effective use of our post-planning and clean-up time while our teachers' children are still in school. For the first day of school, almost all of the preschools in the area use Labor Day as a starting point, which allows staffs to attend workshops and have pre-planning meetings after their own children have started school. This past August, for instance, our staff could choose from 8 different workshops, all of which were offered on weekdays. Preplanning activities and room prep are very time-consuming, and we continue to think it is best for the staff to be able to do all of this after their own children have started school. Some families with preschoolers tend to vacation up to Labor Day (smaller crowds and lower rates) as well. We know our calendar does not suit everyone perfectly, but we are trying for a good balance.

Can you offer 3-day pre-k, 2-day 3's, 5-day 3's and 5-day 2's? Those choices were listed on the class options survey last fall, but none got enough interest to offer them. Also, our 2's and 3's share the same classrooms on alternate days (i.e. MTTh 3's and WF 2's use the same room), so changing one age group affects the other as well. **Since there is often a lot of interest in the 4-day pre-k class, can you offer 2 of those?** We have done that for two years now, based on the anticipated demand indicated by the class options surveys. We'll see what the surveys show this year when we send them out in mid-November. The teachers like 5-day pre-k since it helps not only to get all the goals accomplished but also to give enough time for all the extra activities they like to incorporate into lesson plans. The staff has so many creative ideas.....we like to do them all!

Why isn't a foreign language offered? Mostly due to time constraints. We already offer music and creative movement to all ages, so adding a third "extra" would reduce

the amount of time for other classroom activities. Adding another resource teacher would also add cost, so that would need to be reflected in tuition. We have done a lot of reading and investigating, and we still believe that music and creative movement have the most long-term benefits in preparing children to read and to learn. Some studies of foreign language in early childhood classrooms indicated that offering instruction once a week for 15-20 minutes does not have the benefits of longer or more frequent instruction. With a half-day program, we simply can't offer it daily and the age of our students doesn't allow for more than 20 minutes at a time. Our students do learn songs in several other languages in music class, so they have some exposure then. We've also tried offering Spanish a couple of times as an afternoon enrichment class, but the children seemed too tired or disinterested in a 45-minute class that involved more cognitive skills at the end of their school day.

Can there be more opportunities for parent volunteers? Yes, please just tell your child's teachers what you're interested in doing; we'll try to work it in! We have deliberately not created a large parent-oriented volunteer system since for many, having your child in preschool is the first opportunity you've had in months or years to have any time at all to yourself! Some of our parents work during school hours, and others have infants or toddlers still at home. We know that your volunteer hours will be crucial when your children reach elementary school, so we hope that having a child in preschool now may give you a much-needed, well-deserved break or allows you to get work done or spend time with other little ones at home, while knowing that your preschooler is happily engaged at school.

All of our parents volunteer to help with a party during the year, but if you want more opportunities, please just let us know what you have in mind. We welcome those who like to read books, play a musical instrument, go on an outside nature walk, help with art projects, etc.

Maybe you have a hobby or career to share with the children. Some parents came in to do pumpkin carving in the past week. If one of your child's teachers has morning carpool duty, you could ask about coming in to the class from 8:45-9:10 while one of the teachers is on duty, just to help out and be an extra pair of hands.

I must add that most 2 year olds do not enjoy having their parents in the room since they are not used to sharing you with others! Generally the above ideas are best for those classes for 3's and older.

May we pay tuition by credit card? This would add an expense for the school that we'd have to pass on to parents, so we continue to request checks or cash. Many parents do have their banks send checks automatically, so that can take less time. Some families make 3 or 4 payments during the year rather than 9, but we know that's not feasible for everyone.

Can more days be offered to 2's, and also enrichment classes after noon?

Since all 2's classes meet in rooms that are used by 3's the other days, we simply do not have space for an additional class. Although a 5-day class for 2's might attract new families, the current families have indicated in surveys that we don't have enough families interested at this time. As for enrichment classes, the time of day for the classes, after a full, busy morning of regular classroom activities, doesn't seem to suit most 2's. The 2's already have music class and creative movement class during the morning as well. The enrichment classes are 45 minutes in length, which seems long for most 2's attention span at that time of day.

Could there be more opportunities for parents to meet? We want to support and encourage the family feel that CMK has. In the past, events like parent coffees have not been particularly well attended since so many parents use school time as their opportunity to get things done, exercise, work, go to appointments, or run errands. Some parents (or classes) occasionally arrange to meet with their children on the playgrounds after school hours, which is a great way to get to know other parents. Although that doesn't suit everyone due to nap schedules and other commitments, it is a good way to get acquainted. Setting up individual playdates works well too. Some meet other parents after Chapel to talk, while others take walks in the neighborhood after dropping children off in the morning.

Can we get reminders about photo day closer to the day of the photographer's visit?

Yes, we'll start doing that next week!

Why is a tuition payment due in September if we have already paid the previous May?

Why is tuition the same in "short" months like December as it is in other months?

We've always divided tuition into 9 equal payments. The first payment is due in May, prior to the following school year. The other 8 payments are due from September to April. So when a payment is due in May for the following school year, parents aren't making "double" payments (the last one for the current year plus the first one for the following year). Parents suggested this system and we think it works well. It also helps keep the school's cash flow more consistent. If your child enrolled in the middle of the school year or in late August or September, you might still have a May tuition payment. Parents have let us know they prefer 9 equal payments rather than changing them based on the length of the month since it helps household budgets to pay the same amount each time.

Thank you all again for your responses to the May '16 survey; your opinions and feedback do make a difference! Please feel free to share your thoughts with us any time during the school year.

PRAYER TIME

Below is a prayer that we say in Chapel every month, and some classes also use it during circle time. You may like having this prayer for your family.....it's short enough that you can even pray together in carpool line in the morning! We hope you will be blessed.

Good morning, Lord,
This is Your day,
I am Your child,
Show me the way.
Amen.

In previous years, a few staff members visited Montgomery Elementary school and had a meeting with five of their kindergarten teachers to discuss readiness issues, i.e. what they expect of an entering kindergartner. We were pleased that our goals and objectives are very similar to theirs; we benefited from the conversation about where to focus our efforts. Our kindergarten teacher has also visited Chesnut to observe classes and talk with the kindergarten and 1st grade teachers there. We have had some other informal contact with other schools as well. In addition, we have aligned our goals with the state standards published by the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL). We want parents to know that our commitment to preparing our students for what follows their years at CMK continues to be strong, so we always gather input to ensure that we accomplish our goals.