

SPARK

Academy

PARENT/GUARDIAN HANDBOOK

2023-2024

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WHO WE ARE

Spark Academy is an innovative, early care and learning center with students aged six weeks through pre-kindergarten. We strive to accommodate families in the community with the high-quality care they deserve. The design of the school is to provide a comprehensive learning experience for all children through an engaging curriculum in an environment that inspires creativity and the inspiration to grow in all domains of child growth and development: physical, cognitive, social and emotional, and linguistic (including bilingual and multilingual). Our innovative mixed-income model ensures that every child has the opportunity to participate and thrive in our program.

LICENSING

Spark Academy is a private program voluntarily licensed to serve 175 children, per location, by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. A copy of the licensing rules is available for review in the Spark Academy office and may be accessed [HERE](#) or at the following URL: www.ncchildcare.ncdhhs.gov.

MISSION STATEMENT - Spark is reimagining early childhood care and learning for a diverse population of families who seek an experience that will provide their child a strong foundation for success today and beyond.

VISION STATEMENT - In Development

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

Spark Academy is governed by The Girls Leadership Academy of Wilmington School Board of Directors. The Board of Directors is a volunteer board consisting of parents and community members. There are currently 5-7 voting members. The Board sets policies, makes the school budget, and oversees the Director and the School President. Parents are encouraged to come to the meetings. More information is available on the Spark Academy website.

PHILOSOPHY

We believe in the right environment, a child's natural curiosity and creativity leads to endless opportunities to grow in knowledge and develop a love of learning. We provide that environment at Spark Academy by making it a safe and nurturing place where your child will be encouraged to build, splash, dash, pretend and create their way to exciting discoveries about the world around them while building a foundation for future learning. We allow children to join the Spark Academy Family as infants and stay with us throughout their preschool years.

Each day with us will be a chance for your child to develop general learning competencies and executive functions such as attention, working memory, self-regulation, reasoning, problem-solving, and approaches to learning. Your child will be provided with learning opportunities adapted to their age, developmental stage, and learning style as early as infancy. Full-day, year-round care and all-day preschool in one location provide your child with a foundation for lifelong learning and success.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is a **top** priority for Spark Academy. Personal information of families and staff will not be shared for any reason without prior written consent of the individual. When discussing a child's activities and friends in the classroom, only first names will be used. In situations regarding behavior problems and/or Incident/Accident Reports, names of children involved will never be given to families. Procure is an app used to communicate with parents/guardians and staff. Please be advised, staff members can see/read all messages sent via Procure. As such, Procure communication topics should be limited to topics you are comfortable being read by staff.

GENERAL INFORMATION

STAFF CONTACT LIST - Final List in Development

WHO TO CONTACT - Final List in Development

SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS & VOLUNTEERS

Substitute teachers and volunteers for Spark Academy will be vetted prior to participation. Substitutes must meet the same qualifications as teachers to work in the classroom. Volunteers will be required to show proof of age and provide an approved criminal background check before working in a classroom under the supervision of the classroom teachers. Parent volunteers are always welcome, and will participate in appropriate activities as scheduled.

23-24 SCHOOL CALENDAR

The calendar can be accessed [HERE](#) or at the following URL: bit.ly/3P1G53r

HOURS OF OPERATION

Spark Academy is open Monday-Friday from 7:00AM–6:00PM. The daily schedule includes Morning Care from 7–9AM; Instructional Day from 9AM–3PM, and Afternoon Care from 3–6PM.

HOLIDAYS

Spark Academy is closed for the following holidays:

- New Year's Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday
- Good Friday
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Veteran's Day
- Thanksgiving (Two days)
- Winter Break (Up to six days based on the year)

If the holiday falls on a weekend day, Spark Academy will close on the nearest week day. For example: if New Year's Day falls on a Saturday, Spark Academy will close on Friday. If New Year's Day falls on a Sunday, Spark Academy will close on Monday. Families will be given advance notice in the event of additional closings.

Professional development days are essential to ensuring the highest quality care for your child and education for our staff. Professional development days will be planned accordingly each year in advance, with dates communicated to parents/guardians.

CLASSROOMS

There are twelve classrooms at Spark Academy

Room	Age	Ratio	Schedule
3 Infants Rooms	6 weeks - 1 year	2 teachers: 8 children	7 AM to 6 PM
2 Young Toddler	1 - 2 year	2 teachers: 10 children	7 AM to 6 PM
2 Older Toddler	2 - 3 year	2 teachers: 15 children	7 AM to 6 PM
3 Young Preschool	3 - 4 year	2 teachers: 24 children	7 AM to 6 PM
2 Preschool/Pre-K	4 - 5 year	2 teachers: 24 children	7 AM to 6 PM

ENROLLMENT

CHECKLIST

Items that must be completed and submitted before a child may attend Spark Academy

- Financial Contract (signed by parent/guardian)
- Parent/Guardian Handbook review (signed by parent/guardian)
- Child Information Form
- Health Appraisal
- Immunization Record
- Emergency Contact & Parental Consent
- Medical Consent Form
- Medication Authorization Form
- Emergency Care Plan (if applicable)
- Food Policy Agreement for children requiring for, milk, or baby food
- Allergy Action Plan for children requiring medication due to allergic reactions
- Sunscreen & Insect Repellent Permission Form
- Copy of Driver's License
- Field Trip Permission Form (signed by parent/guardian)
- Sliding Fee/Scholarship Forms (if applicable)

REGISTRATION + TUITION

An annual, non-refundable registration fee of \$200 is to be paid at enrollment, and annually in the month of a student's enrollment anniversary.

2023-2024 Weekly Rates

Infants & Toddlers	\$320
2 Years	\$300
3-5 Years	\$280

FINANCIAL AGREEMENTS

Upon enrollment and any changes to tuition, families are provided a Financial Contract. This contract should be carefully reviewed. The contract states the days and hours your child may be at Spark Academy as well as the tuition amount due each month. This contract is binding and can only be changed with approval and signatures from parents/guardians and the Director.

PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Tuition is paid using [Procure](#), check, cash or automatic draft. Please contact the Operations Coordinator to set up payments online via [Tuition Express](#). Tuition is due by 5PM on Friday for the following week. There is a \$5.00 late fee per day for payments not initiated by 5PM on Monday.

An invoice will be sent directly from Procure to each family on Wednesday before tuition is due. If you do not receive an invoice you are responsible for contacting the Operations Coordinator and requesting one.

SUBSIDIZED CARE–DSS

Spark Academy accepts childcare subsidy vouchers. Parents will be responsible for full payments until authorization has been received and a weekly copay determination has been calculated. If at any time or reason assistance is stopped, parents will be responsible for full tuition as of the date the assistance ended.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Financial assistance is available to qualified applicants. Parents/guardians interested in applying for financial assistance must first apply for subsidy with the DHHS, as Spark Academy uses the same paperwork to determine qualification. Approval from DHHS is not needed to qualify for assistance from Spark Academy. However, a completed DHHS application and a copy of the letter of approval/denial from DHHS is required. Annual registration fee, field trip fees, and any fees beyond tuition will follow the Sliding Scale. Late pick up, late payment and delinquent will not follow the Sliding Scale.

MULTIPLE CHILD DISCOUNT

Families with two or more children enrolled full-time at Spark Academy are eligible for a \$10 discount to be applied to the oldest child's weekly tuition fee.

LATE PICK UP FEE

Spark Academy closes at 6 PM, Monday - Friday.

Parents/caregivers will be charged \$20 for every 5 minutes a child is present after their contracted pick-up time. This late fee will pay for the additional time teachers' must stay past their daily schedule. Teachers will record late fees for processing and parents/guardians will receive a written notice from the Director stating the date and amount of the late pick-up fee. Your invoice for the following week will include the late fee.

If parents do not arrive to pick up their child from the program by 6:00, staff members will first try to contact the parents using all phone numbers provided on the Emergency Contact and Medical Consent form. If parents are unable to be reached, staff members will try to contact all emergency contact persons. If staff members are unable to contact emergency contact persons, the Director will be notified and they will then alert the Department of Human Services and/or the Police Department.

For a complete list of Safe Procedures for Pick-up and Delivery from the State of North Carolina, [click here](#)..

INSUFFICIENT FUNDS

All payments rejected due to insufficient funds will be charged a \$25 penalty. Missed payments and late fees must be paid within 4 weeks. Repeated incidents could result in termination of childcare services. A payment plan should be discussed with the Director if a family is having trouble making tuition payments.

DELINQUENT ACCOUNTS

Families will be charged \$5.00 per day starting on the Tuesday after payment is due. Families that are behind in payments more than 2 weeks without contacting the Director and setting up a payment arrangement may have their childcare services terminated. For information about assistance programs that will help cover the cost of childcare tuition, please speak with the Director. A payment plan must be agreed upon between the family and Spark Academy before an account will be considered "in good standing" and no longer eligible for termination. This requires a signed payment plan contract.

ENROLLMENT RECORDS

Each fall, Spark Academy completes an audit of enrollment records. At the conclusion of this audit, parents/caregivers will be notified if anything needs to be updated. Some forms must be updated every year, including the Emergency Contact and Medical Consent form. Other records must be updated throughout the

year, such as physicals and immunization records. When visiting your child's physician for an annual "well-child" appointment, please request a hard copy of your child's physical and most recent immunization record. You may bring these updated items to the Operations Coordinator.

In addition, a new Emergency Contact and Medical Consent form must be completed when a change occurs, such as a new address, place of employment, or health insurance provider.

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

WEATHER EVENTS

Spark Academy will remain open during most weather events. The Director will monitor the national, regional, and local weather services, as well as news stations to determine when it is appropriate to close Spark Academy early, delay opening, or cancel care for the entire day. In the event Spark Academy has a delayed opening, early dismissal, or will be closed for the day, parents/guardians will be contacted via an all-call, a text message, and an email. Local news outlets will also be notified.

Upon receiving notification of early dismissal, children should be picked up from Spark Academy within a reasonable amount of time to ensure all parents/guardians, children, and staff can travel safely home.

TORNADO

In case of a tornado, each classroom has a designated area to seek shelter until the emergency is over. Parents/guardians will be contacted as soon as safely possible following an emergency situation. For the safety of children, staff, and families, we ask that you not attempt to pick up your child during an emergency situation.

FIRE OR OTHER EMERGENCY SITUATION

Fire regulations and tornado warning procedures are posted near the exits in each classroom. In the event of a fire, bomb threat, or other evacuation emergencies, children and staff will immediately leave the building and go to designated locations. Children and staff may not re-enter the building until given the "All Clear" by the Director. Parents/guardians will be contacted as soon as safely possible following an emergency situation.

MISSING OR ABDUCTED CHILD

In the event of a missing child, the teacher will search for the child in the immediate area, while another staff member calls the Director to help with the search.

- If the child cannot be located in a reasonable amount of time, the Director will notify the Police Department and the child's parent/guardian.
- In the event of an abducted child, the teacher must immediately contact the Director and the Police Department, and the child's parent/guardian.

POWER FAILURE

Staff members and children should remain in the classroom and if possible, proceed with activities as usual. If safe, classes may go to the outdoor playground until power resumes.

- If power cannot be restored within a reasonable amount of time, Spark Academy will close, and the children's parent/guardian will be contacted.
 - The administrative staff will contact parents/guardians to inform them of early dismissal. and the need to immediately pick up their child.
 - Activities will resume as soon as possible until parents/guardians arrive.

DRILLS

There are a variety of drills that we are required to conduct each school year. Throughout the year, we will have ten (10) fire drills, one (1) earthquake drill, two (2) tornado drills and two (2) lock down drills. We spend time prior to the drills preparing children for proper procedures associated with each drill. Keeping your child safe remains our priority. Please reinforce with your child the importance of following directions and to stay with their teachers.

ARRIVAL + DEPARTURE

ARRIVAL

Parents dropping off and/or picking up children from school should enter the campus through the XYZ entrance. Parents are required to accompany their child into the Spark Academy building and into their classroom. Parents should also speak with the teacher in the classroom each morning, if only briefly. We encourage parents to communicate with their child's teacher about their child's temperament that day, how they slept the night before, whether they have eaten that morning, etc. Most children go through periods of difficulty with separating from their parent(s). This is common and developmentally appropriate.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL DROP OFF:

- Establish a regular, predictable routine. Whether you have a kiss and a hug and go, or help your child put their things in their cubby first, do it the same way every day. What often makes separating

stressful for children is uncertainty. If your child can predict what will happen next, the separation won't be as difficult.

- Separate once. If you come back into the classroom again and again, it will increase your child's stress. Remember the moment of separation is the worst part for your child, so doing it more than once makes it more stressful for your child
- Be reliable. Return when promised. Children who are picked up later than expected may have more difficulty separating. Phrase time in terms your child will understand. For example, you will be back after snack time or before nap time.

DEPARTURE

Spark Academy closes at 6:00 PM Monday – Friday. If you will be late picking up your child, please provide us as much notice as possible. Please note there is a late fee for arriving after 6:00 PM. If a new person or someone Spark Academy teachers and staff are not familiar with is picking up your child, it is essential that you inform your child's teacher in advance. This person must be listed as an authorized person on the Emergency Contact and Parent Consent form. Remind the authorized person that they will be asked for photo identification to ensure your child's safety. Even if the individual has picked up before, they may need to provide identification if the teacher in charge has never met them.

Parents should also speak with the teacher in the classroom each afternoon if only briefly. Be sure to say goodbye to your child's teachers so they know you are leaving. Once you have reunited with your child and are departing, Spark Academy is no longer responsible for your child. For safety reasons, please do not let your child run ahead of you inside or outside of the building.

ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance is strongly encouraged for the benefit of the child. If your child will be absent, it is appreciated and helpful if you call Spark Academy so the teacher will know and can plan accordingly. If your child will be absent for an extended period (more than 2 days), Spark Academy should be notified in writing of the date the absence will begin and the expected date your child will return. Upon return, please provide a written note of excuse for the absence, which will be entered into the child's permanent file.

Patterns of unexcused absences, arrivals and early departures will be monitored and problem-solved by the teacher and Director. Enrollment may be terminated if a child is absent for a period of 3 days or more and no notice has been received or contact made by the family.

HEALTH + SAFETY POLICIES

ILLNESS

Our first priority at Spark Academy is providing a healthy, safe learning environment for all children. A child will be sent home if any of the following is experienced: an illness prevents the child from participating comfortably in activities (as determined by staff); an illness results in a greater need for care than staff can reasonably provide without compromising the health or safety of other children in the classroom; or a child is experiencing any of the following conditions:

Your child should stay home they present

- Fever of 100 (under the arm) or greater. Children must be 24 hours fever-free without fever-reducing medication to return to Spark Academy.
- Signs/symptoms of severe illness, including lethargy, uncontrolled coughing, inexplicable irritability or persistent crying, difficulty breathing, and/or wheezing.
- Diarrhea (not associated with diet changes or medications) for more than two instances. Diarrhea must stop for 24 hours or the continued diarrhea is deemed not be infectious by a licensed healthcare professional.
- Blood in stools not explainable by dietary change, medication, or constipation/hard stools
- Vomiting, one instance. Children may return after vomiting has been resolved for 12 hours or until a healthcare provider determines the cause for vomiting is not contagious and the child is not in danger of dehydration.
- Persistent abdominal pain (continues more than 2 hours) or intermittent pain associated with fever or other signs/symptoms of illness.
- Mouth sores with drooling, unless a health care provider determines the sores are not contagious.
- Rash, until a physician determines that these symptoms do not indicate a communicable disease.
- Pink eye (conjunctivitis) until after treatment has been administered for 24 hours.
- Scabies, until after treatment has been completed.

- Tuberculosis, until a health care provider states the child is on appropriate therapy and can attend childcare.
- Impetigo, until 24 hours after treatment is initiated.
- Strep throat, until 24 hours after initial antibiotic treatment and cessation of fever.
- Chickenpox, until all sores have dried and crusted (usually 6 days).
- Hand, Foot, and Mouth sores have dried and crusted and fever-free.
- Pertussis, until 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment has been completed.
- Mumps, until 9 days after onset of symptoms.
- Hepatitis A virus, until one week after onset of illness.
- Measles, until four days after onset of rash.
- Rubella, until 6 days after onset of rash.
- Unspecified respiratory tract illness accompanied by another illness which requires exclusion.
- Herpes simplex with uncontrollable drooling

A child who becomes ill while at Spark Academy will be comfortably isolated in order to limit exposure of other children to communicable disease. While waiting for their parents/guardians to arrive. For this reason, we ask families to make every effort to pick up a sick child as soon as notified..

Spark Academy reserves the right to make the final determination of exclusion due to illness. Any exceptions to our illness policy will require a written note from a licensed healthcare professional stating that the child is not contagious.

Parents will be notified by telephone, text and/or Procure when their child is ill and needs to go home.. Please contact Spark Academy via phone or text within 30 minutes whenever your child is ill. It is vitally important that one parent or guardian is reachable at all times. If we do not receive a response after 30 minutes, we will refer to your emergency contact list.

NOTICE OF EXPOSURE + REPORTING DISEASE

If your child is exposed to a communicable disease, a notice will be sent by the Spark Academy via email. If your child or anyone in your household becomes ill with a communicable disease, please notify the Director

immediately. In the event a child is reported to have a communicable disease, the Director will notify the health department.

HAND WASHING

Frequent hand washing with soap and warm, running water is the most effective way to reduce and prevent the spread of illnesses such as the flu, diarrhea, and pink eye. commonly found in childcare centers and preschools. Parents are encouraged to assist their child in the hand washing process upon arrival. Other times your child (and staff members) will be expected to wash their hands:

- Upon arriving at the center or when changing classrooms
- After each diaper change or using the toilet
- Before and after mealtimes
- Before and after administering medication
- After handling bodily fluids (mucus, blood vomit)
- Before and after using the sensory table
- After coming indoors from the playground
- After handling pets and other animals
- After cleaning or handling garbage

Warm, running water (no colder than 60 degrees F) and soap must be used. Hands must be rubbed vigorously for at least 20 seconds, including the backs of hands, between fingers, under nails, and under any jewelry. A disposable paper towel should be used to dry hands and turn off the faucet. Help reinforce the importance of hand washing by encouraging frequent hand washing at home as well.

MEDICATIONS

Medications are administered only by select authorized staff. When a medication is given, the teacher will document the type of medication administered, the dosage, and the time it was given. Prescription and over-the-counter medications must be provided to Spark Academy staff in the original container, clearly labeled with the child's full name and birth date. Spark Academy staff will not administer any medication without a signed Medication Authorization Form. Forms can be obtained from your child's teacher or from the Operations Coordinator.

Spark Academy will not administer acetaminophen or ibuprofen for a fever. To administer acetaminophen or ibuprofen to a child under 2 years old, Spark Academy requires a doctor's note with dosage and timing.

Medications are stored in a locked box (refrigerated medications) or in a high cabinet (non-refrigerated medications) while in use at Spark Academy. The Medication Authorization Form must always remain with the medication. Spark Academy may not store unused or expired medications.

Parents/guardians will be notified to bring current supplies and discard the unused or expired portions.

PHYSICALS + IMMUNIZATIONS

Each child must have a current physical and immunization record on file at Spark Academy to attend. The physical on file must be updated annually; immunization records must be updated whenever a new immunization is received.

DOCUMENTATION OF ACCIDENTS/INCIDENTS

Staff members shall document accidents and incidents that occur at Spark Academy using an Accident/Incident Report Form and Incident Report on Procure and/or in writing. The parent/guardian shall sign the report the same day as the incident. A copy is given to the parent/guardian upon request. All Accident/Incident Reports must be given to the Director to be placed in the child's permanent file.

DOCUMENTATION OF HEALTH INCIDENTS

Each time a parent/guardian is contacted regarding an ill child or symptoms of illness, a health check will be completed on the day of their return. All families will be notified of any communicable illnesses present at Spark Academy via a sign posted on the main entrance explaining the illness as well as the affected classrooms. In addition, families with children in the classroom of the infected child will receive notification of illness via email.

DOCUMENTATION OF ALLERGIES

A child with allergies must have an Allergy Action Plan posted in a visible location in the classroom. If the allergy is food-related, an Allergy Action Plan must also be posted in the kitchen area. All staff working in the classroom of a child with allergies must review the Allergy Action Plan to ensure understanding of

emergency procedures should the child have an allergic reaction. All allergic reactions must be documented with a Health Incident Form.

DOCUMENTATION OF SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

An Emergency Care Plan will be on file for any child with special health care needs (seizures, allergies, etc.). A copy of the Emergency Care Plan must be kept in the classroom emergency binder. All staff working in the classroom must familiarize themselves with this plan, should an emergency arise. If necessary, staff will receive training regarding a child's specific health care needs.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL OR DENTAL PROCEDURE

It is important that parents/guardians complete and update, as needed, an Emergency Contact & Parental Consent and the Medical Consent Form. This form contains contact information for all parents/guardians as well as the individuals authorized to pick up the child in the event of illness or emergency. In addition, the form allows Spark Academy staff to seek emergency medical or dental care from authorized care providers in the event of serious injury. It is the responsibility of the parent/guardian to complete this form and to make corrections and updates to this information when necessary.

- If a child becomes ill or injured after arriving at Spark Academy, the Director will attempt to contact the parent/guardian at all available telephone numbers. If a parent/guardian cannot be reached, the individuals listed as emergency contacts/authorized pick up persons on the Emergency Contact & Parental Consent form will be called.
- Children who are ill or seriously injured will be sent to the office and remain under the supervision of the designated administrator until a parent arrives.
- If the child requires immediate medical attention, the staff member who witnessed the emergency will remain with the injured child and instruct another member of the staff to call 911 and the Director will contact the parents/guardians.
- A staff member who witnessed the emergency will accompany the child to the hospital, bringing the child's physical exam, immunization records, and Emergency Contact & Parental Consent Form.

SUNSCREEN + INSECT REPELLENT

All families are required to supply sunscreen for their child/ren for outdoor activities. A Sunscreen and Insect Repellent permission slip must be on file before sunscreen will be applied to a child. Sunscreen must be 30 SPF or above, and will be applied by classroom teachers as needed throughout the day. Parents/guardians are encouraged to apply sunscreen, and insect repellent as the season dictates, prior to arrival at Spark Academy for the day.

MANDATORY REPORTERS

As childcare professionals who interact with children on a daily basis, each staff member of Spark Academy is a mandatory child abuse and neglect reporter and must contact the North Carolina Division of Child Development and Early Education and the Department of Social Services whenever abuse or neglect is suspected.

TOBACCO USE

Cigarettes, cigars, chewing tobacco, vapes and smokeless tobacco products are prohibited on premises, including parking lots and outdoor play areas.

ACCESS POLICY

Any person at Spark Academy who is not an owner, staff member, substitute teacher, subcontracted staff or approved volunteer shall not have unrestricted access to children for whom that person is not the parent, guardian or custodian, nor be counted in the staff to child ratio. Unrestricted access means that a person has contact with a child alone or is directly responsible for childcare.

Persons who do not have unrestricted access will be always under the direct supervision and monitoring of a paid staff member and will not be allowed to assume any childcare responsibilities. The primary responsibility of the supervision and monitoring will be assumed by the teacher. Spark Academy buildings are always locked and only staff may open doors for visitors.

If staff do not know or recognize the visitor, they shall ask for ID or get the Director. Spark Academy staff will approach anyone who is on the property with authorization or knowledge to determine the situation. If a staff

member is unsure about the reason, the Director will determine approval for the person to be on site. Non-agency persons who are on the property for other purposes such as maintenance, repairs, etc., will be monitored by a Spark Academy staff member and should not interact with children on the premises.

A sex offender who has been convicted of a sex offense against a minor (even if the sex offender is the parent, guardian, or custodian) who is required to register with the North Carolina sex offender registry:

- Shall not operate, manage, be employed by, or act as a contractor or volunteer at the childcare center.
- Shall not be on the property of the childcare center without written permission from the Director, except for the time reasonably necessary to transport the offender's own minor child to and from Spark Academy.. The Director is not obligated to provide permission and must consult with their licensing agent first.

AFFIDAVIT POLICY

At times families may be dealing with difficult situations at home. When legal matters are present in the home, families may need to collect affidavits for their legal team. Due to the nature of the relationship between caregiver and child, families may choose to ask a Spark Academy staff member to provide such a statement. Our program's priority is providing the best possible care when in our care and our focus will remain on the child, making sure all their needs are met during what could be a difficult time at home. Spark Academy staff members will not provide written statements or affidavits of a professional nature to families.

CURRICULUM

DAILY SCHEDULE

All Spark Academy classrooms have a daily schedule tailored to each age group. Schedules will be provided for your child's classroom program. Spark Academy uses [STREAMin3](#) and [Creative Curriculum](#), with attention to the [North Carolina Foundations for Early Learning and Development](#).

STREAMin3 is designed to provide **integrated and intentional interactions**. A primary part of the STREAMin3 are the 5 Core Skills that are the building blocks for learning. **Relate, Regulate, Communicate, Think, and Move** will be incorporated into each day in relative, engaging ways. STREAM skills are developed through activities that focus on Science, Technology, Reading, Engineering, Art and Math.

FREE PLAY

"Free-play" (also called child-initiated activities, free choice, and self-selection) activities are incorporated into the day. During free-play, teachers actively participate by asking questions about what children are doing, participating in their imaginary play, reading books when prompted, encouraging children to try new activities or play with a new toy, etc. Free play is another opportunity for a child to grow socially and cognitively through the development of relationships.

OUTDOOR PLAY

Each classroom's daily schedule incorporates outdoor play. Staff members actively engage in activities when prompted by the children. Outdoor play allows children to run, jump, climb, and use their bodies in ways that would otherwise be unsafe in an indoor classroom. In addition, a large amount of social interaction occurs when children play outdoors. Children can choose who to interact with because they are engaged in fewer teacher-directed activities and more child-directed play.

Spark Academy has designed an unparalleled outdoor learning environment where children will have the opportunity to use their imagination while gaining infinite knowledge based on science, math, and social concepts. This is also an opportune time for teachers to observe and gain information as they plan for individual children and their classrooms.

Children will go outside year-round, including winter. Only during extreme weather conditions will the children remain indoors all day.

Our teachers refer to the [Child Care Weather Watch](#) poster from the North Carolina Department of Public Health to determine if it is too hot or cold to play outdoors. It is important for parents/guardians to send their children in appropriate clothing and outerwear for the weather conditions. Please clearly label all articles of clothing with your child's name. If a child is not dressed appropriately for the weather, we will contact parents/guardians to provide the appropriate attire. Please ask your child's teacher if you have any questions about weather-appropriate clothing.

NAP/REST

The North Carolina Department of Child Development and Early Education ([NCDCDEE](#)) requires that all children must be provided a regularly scheduled nap or resting time. The length of time a child should have to remain resting varies by child. There is no hard and fast rule regarding the maximum amount of time a

child should have to remain resting. Children will not be forced to sleep but may be encouraged to lie quietly or provided an alternative quiet activity if unable to rest.

For those children NOT in cribs, we encourage you to bring a familiar item from home to use during nap/rest time, such as a small blanket or stuffed toy. These items will be stored in your child's backpack or mat bag; there is limited space for storage of such items. Please take this into consideration when deciding which items to bring. All items should be clearly labeled with your child's name, as all class laundry is sent home weekly to be washed.

MULTIMEDIA

The use of multimedia in our program is an extension of the teaching and learning that takes place in our classrooms. Teachers will determine what and when relevant content is beneficial to enhance children's learning. Recommended guidelines by health and child development experts will be observed.

WEAPONS VIOLENT PLAY

There is a strict policy of allowing no weapon play at Spark Academy. Children will be discouraged from playing with real or fake weapons of any type or size, or to pretend that other items are weapons, including their fingers, hands, or blocks. Redirection will be used when a child is engaging in weapon or violent play. If a child brings a weapon to Spark Academy, the weapon will be placed out of sight and sent home the same day with a note explaining the policy about weapons.

Competitive behavior is minimized in our program. In young children, competition often increases negative behavior and decreases acceptance of others. Bullying is not considered acceptable behavior; all efforts will be made to guide children in finding appropriate ways to interact with others.

PETS & VISITING ANIMALS

Spark Academy staff may introduce a class pet to the classroom. Please make sure you share any pet allergies with your student's teachers. Pets and visiting animals that are brought into the classroom must be carefully considered for their temperament, health risks, and appropriateness for young children. Other than identified service animals, no animals may enter into Spark Academy without first notifying and receiving permission from the Director. Once approved by the Director, pets and visiting animals must have documentation from a licensed veterinarian or animal shelter to show that the animal(s) is fully immunized and suitable for contact with children.

ASSESSMENTS

Spark Academy uses the STREAMin3 checklists and assessment to evaluate students' development levels when entering the program and then annually each spring. Weekly reports will be given to parents/guardians indicating where children are *glowing* and where they are *growing*. Parents/guardians are encouraged to work with their child's teacher to assess and meet their child's needs

PARENT/GUARDIAN-TEACHER CONFERENCES & ASSESSMENT PORTFOLIOS

Spark Academy uses the STREAMin3 assessment program to help evaluate children's development. Conferences will typically be held annually, as well as each time your child transitions classrooms. Parents may request additional meetings with teachers as desired. The goal of the conference is to gain insight into your child's development, both in the Spark Academy setting as well as in the home. During conferences, your child's development and any goals you may have for your child will be discussed. Parents/guardians are encouraged to share observations that enhance the teacher's understanding of the child's development.

FIELD TRIPS

Spark Academy offers a rich variety of daily experiences.. Any field trips off campus where students will be transported will require a Field Trip Permission Form. Parents/guardians will be notified at least 3 weeks in advance of all field trips requiring a Field Trip Permission Form. If you do not wish for your child to attend a particular field trip, alternative arrangements for onsite care will be made..

As a participant in the Spark Academy program, your child may engage in short, unannounced field trips including but not limited to walks as a class around the perimeter of the building and/or nearby spaces. Teacher-child ratios are always maintained. A Field Trip Permission Form form must be completed at the time of enrollment for this type of field trip.

TRANSPORTATION

Spark Academy uses school vehicles for off-site field trips. Head counts shall be taken before leaving the building, after entering the vehicle, throughout the field trip, after restroom breaks, upon returning to the vehicle, and when re-entering the building. When children leave the vehicle, the vehicle shall be inspected to ensure no children are left in the vehicle.

MEALS + SNACKS

	Breakfast	Lunch	Snack
Infant Classrooms	Individualized	Individualized	Individualized
Young Toddlers	7:45AM	11AM	2:30PM
Older Toddlers	8AM	11:20AM	2:30PM
Young Preschool	8:15AM	11:45AM	3PM
Preschool/Pre-K	8:30AM	12PM	3PM

FOOD SERVICE POLICY

At Spark Academy, children are provided a nutritious breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack, daily. Spark Academy follows the nutritional guidelines established by the Child and Adult Food Program ([CACFP](#)). Monthly menus will be posted on the Spark Academy website and in the lobby. You may request a printed copy from the Operations Coordinator. Children will be encouraged to sample all foods that are offered, but will never be forced to eat. Please inform your child's teacher of any allergies, if your child cannot eat a certain food, or has a specific dietary requirement (e.g., vegetarian, vegan, lactose intolerant) so a substitution can be made. For certain dietary restrictions, you may be asked to provide food from home for your child.

FOOD FROM HOME

Children are welcome to bring in treats to celebrate a birthday or holiday. Due to various food allergies and dietary restrictions in our classrooms, as well as state regulations, we require supplying store-bought snacks in the original packaging. Please check with your child's teacher before bringing any homemade snacks. A list of healthy snack options approved by the USDA and North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services may be found [HERE](#) or is available from the Director.

FOOD ALLERGIES + ACTION PLANS

If your child has a food allergy, please complete an Allergy Action Plan form. This form will be posted in your child's room, as well as in food preparation areas. If your child requires medication for an allergic reaction, a physician-signed Allergy Action Plan must be provided along with the medication.

INFANT, TODDLER, TWO-YEAR-OLD PROGRAMS

The following information is specific to the infant, toddler, and two-year-old program rooms.

Parents must supply diapers, wipes, diaper cream, bottles, formula or breast milk, baby food, extra clothing, and pacifiers. Blankets and stuffed toys will NOT be placed in cribs. All items must be labeled with the child's name and classroom. Children may use pacifiers during rest time. To reduce the likelihood of spreading illness, pacifiers must be kept in a child's cubby or diaper bag during all other times of the day.

If you are breastfeeding, please discuss with your child's teacher when your child should be fed breast milk by bottle, and when you would like to come in and feed your child. Spark Academy provides onsite, wellness rooms for breastfeeding mothers. If bottle-feeding with breast milk, it must be brought in ready-to-use containers. For health reasons, we are not able to store bags of frozen milk for extended periods of time.

We recommend that all new foods be tried at home first since a child could have an allergic reaction to foods they have not had before. Please inform your child's teachers on the daily charts of any new foods your child has tried.

SIDS

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the unexpected, sudden death of a child under age 1 for which a cause of death cannot be identified. It is not known what causes SIDS; however, several sleeping practices have been linked to an increased risk for SIDS. Therefore, Spark Academy has a strict policy for infant sleep placement. All infants less than one year will be placed on their back to sleep. Infants shall not be allowed to sleep in a car seat or swing at Spark Academy.

Once a child has been placed in their crib for a nap, if the infant rolls from back to front - and is also able to roll from front to back - it is acceptable to leave the infant sleeping on their stomach. Parents/guardians will be asked to sign an acknowledgement of this milestone. NO heavy blankets, stuffed toys or pillows will be placed in a crib. A request for alternative sleeping positions must be accompanied by a signed and dated physician's note stating the reason for the request.

All staff members who work with infants are required to be certified in ITS-SIDS best practice, renewable every two years.

ATTIRE

Children should be dressed appropriately for both indoor and outdoor activities, daily. Please send your child to Spark Academy in comfortable play clothes and shoes. Play is usually active and often messy; comfortable, washable clothes are important for your child to participate fully in the program. Outdoor play is scheduled every day as an essential part of our planned curriculum.

WHAT TO PROVIDE

All children occasionally get their clothes wet and have toileting accidents. Whenever this occurs, it is best to change the child into an extra set of clothing provided by the family. Your child's teacher will request that you bring a complete change of clothing, including underwear, to be kept at school and replenished as needed. Additionally, each child should have a water bottle or sippy cup, sunscreen, insect repellent, small blanket for rest, travel sized pillow (for those children NOT in cribs), weather appropriate clothes and shoes at Spark Academy. All items should be labeled with the child's name and classroom.

ITEMS FROM HOME

Spark Academy allows one stuffed toy or comfort item to be brought to school for nap/rest time (for those children NOT in cribs). We ask that all items brought to school from home be placed in your child's cubby shortly after arrival by parent. Please clearly label all belongings brought from home. Spark Academy is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged items.

GUIDANCE STRATEGIES

REASONS FOR MISBEHAVIOR

Every adult who cares for children has a responsibility to guide, correct, and socialize children toward appropriate behaviors. These adult actions often are called child guidance and discipline. Positive guidance and discipline are crucial because they promote children's self-control, teach children responsibility and help children make thoughtful choices. The more effective caregivers are at encouraging appropriate child behavior, the less time and effort adults will spend correcting children's misbehavior.

Effective guidance and discipline focus on the development of the child. They also preserve the child's self-esteem and dignity. Actions that insult or belittle are likely to cause children to view their caregivers negatively, which can inhibit learning and can teach the child to be unkind to others. However, actions that acknowledge the child's efforts and progress, no matter how slow or small, are likely to encourage healthy development. Teaching children self-regulation and self-discipline is a demanding task. It requires patience, thoughtful attention, cooperation, and a good understanding of the child. Spark Academy staff will use only positive guidance techniques.

When interacting with young children, staff will ask themselves the following questions: "Am I..."

- Validating feelings?
- Asking open-ended questions?
- Encouraging problem solving?
- Respecting children's choices?
- Using praise and positive reinforcement?
- Talking with children – not at them?
- Circulating throughout the classroom?
- At the child's eye level?

UNDERSTANDING MISBEHAVIORS

If caregivers understand why children misbehave, they can be more successful at reducing behavior problems. Listed here are some of the possible reasons why children misbehave:

- Test whether caregivers will enforce rules.

- They experience different sets of expectations between school and home.
- A child does not understand the rules or are held to expectations that are beyond their developmental levels.
- They want to assert themselves and their independence.
- They feel ill, bored, hungry or sleepy.
- They lack accurate information and prior experience.
- They have been previously "rewarded" for their misbehavior with adult attention.

PREVENTING MISBEHAVIORS

Intervention strategies include but are not limited to the following:

1. One-on-one relationships building activities.
2. Utilizing mental health, social workers, and psychologists services for the child and/or family. Refer to special needs programs if necessary.
3. Class-made books individualized for the student. Individual picture cards to support behavioral expectations.
4. Ways for the student to be of service to the school, others or his or her community.
5. Noticing and describing the child's body, face and actions, labeling of feelings, and acknowledging or true intent.
6. Assessing, teaching, or scaffolding missing executive skills.

BITING

Before age three, biting is somewhat common. When a child repeatedly bites:

1. Identify stressors—not enough structure, too much structure, not enough rest, eating, bowel habits, connection, attunement, etc.
2. Start a stress reduction program at home and school.
 - More touching (skin to skin), massage games (I'm saying goodnight to your legs, arms, hands, fingers, head, etc.)
 - Chest and lap time
 - More schedules and routines

3. Shadow the child and use a teething necklace. There is nothing you can do to help a child learn other ways of getting needs met after the bite has occurred. You must catch the child before the bite. Most bites occur during transitions and unstructured time. Have a person shadow the child who is biting.

When the child begins to bite:

- Place the teething necklace into the child's open mouth. The mouth will close.
- Firmly say, "STOP. No bite! Ouch! (make a pained face) Biting hurts."
- Say, "You wanted _____ (take an educated guess as to what the child wanted). Say _____ (acceptable words) or do _____ (acceptable action)!"
- Make visuals of alternatives to biting: Say, "My turn," put up a STOP hand, play with a different toy, move away, etc.

While biting is an age-appropriate behavior, it is important to remember it is also an unacceptable behavior in a childcare environment.

BITING & BEHAVIOR POLICY

The following process will be followed if a child's behavior continuously takes away from the care or safety of others.

- Meeting with parent/guardian, teachers, and administration to discuss a plan of action to increase positive behavior at school and home. If necessary, an evaluation will be recommended for the child and the parent/guardian will be supplied contact information for the evaluation. If an evaluation is recommended, the parent will have 7 business days to make the appropriate connection and 3 – 4 weeks for the evaluation to take place/be scheduled. All documentation must be provided to the Director. Logs must be kept to seek out triggers and patterns for repeated undesired behavior. Upon written request, these logs will be made available to the parent/guardian and/or evaluator.
- If aggressive behavior/biting occurs two times in the same day the child will be removed from the classroom and may be required to be picked up. If the behavior occurs a third time in the same week, the family may be required to keep the child home the following day.

HOME + SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

NEW FAMILY ORIENTATION

Each family is strongly encouraged to schedule a time with the Director to complete a "New Family Orientation." This orientation is a great time for parents/guardians to drop off routine care items (diapers, bottles, etc.) as well as an opportunity to participate in a portion of classroom activities with their child, familiarizing themselves with their child's routines at Spark Academy. Important policies and procedures are also reviewed with the Director at this time, as well as the paperwork required for enrollment completed. Typically, "New Family Orientation" is scheduled within 2 weeks prior to the start date.

COMMUNICATION

Spark Academy will utilize Procure to communicate, share photos, notes and incident reports as necessary and relevant. A weekly progress report of where your child is *glowing* and *growing* will be sent home.

NEWSLETTERS

A quarterly newsletter will be emailed and posted in your child's classroom. If you sign up for Procure a copy will be sent to you. This newsletter provides you with general information, announcements, and activities at Spark Academy.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Spark Academy is committed to respecting each child's and family's culture and diverse needs. We recognize that culture influences every aspect of a child's development and is reflected in childrearing beliefs and practices. We believe it is important to support and preserve the child's home language usage, faith and beliefs, and cultural traditions. We recognize that children can and will acquire the use of English even when their home language is used and respected.

Spark Academy carries out this philosophy of cultural competence in the following ways:

- Families are treated with respect and sensitivity from our first meeting.

- Families' financial situations are respected when planning for activities that could potentially result in additional costs, through the acceptance of scholarship and subsidy payments, and a clear understanding of payment expectations from the time of enrollment.
- We attempt to learn accurate information about each family, their culture, faith and beliefs, and cultural traditions. We encourage each family, if they feel comfortable, to share this information with us at the time of enrollment. This information is part of the child's daily plan as it relates to meals and snacks, holiday recognition, etc.
- Families are encouraged to be actively involved in what their child is doing in our program through family "homework", dress up days, special occasions, and volunteer opportunities.
- Families are asked to inform us of the best way for them to receive communication (i.e., verbal, written, text, email, etc.)
- Families where English is their second language are encouraged and assisted in becoming knowledgeable about the cognitive value for children of knowing more than one language and providing them with strategies to support, maintain, and preserve their home language. Spark Academy will continue to acquire training annually to further our knowledge of culture, language, and diversity.

ROOM TRANSITIONS

Your child will transition to a new classroom when they have reached the developmental milestones for a particular classroom. As the time for a transition to a new room approaches, you will receive a letter containing information about your child's transition into his/her new classroom. Both your child's current and future teacher are available to address any questions or concerns you have during the transition process. Before the transition into a new classroom has been completed, parents/guardians are encouraged to schedule a meeting with the new teacher in order to familiarize themselves with the new classroom, children, and curriculum.

PARENT/GUARDIAN PARTICIPATION

Parent/guardian participation is strongly encouraged at Spark Academy. Some possible opportunities to participate and contribute to your child's experience include:

- Special activities supervision

- Leading or assisting special projects (sewing, carpentry, cooking, etc.)
- Construction or collection of raw materials for art projects, dramatic play props, etc.
- Eating lunch or snack with your child – please inform the teachers one day in advance
- Volunteering in your child’s classroom or at the center.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Spark Academy asks parents/guardians to complete a program evaluation, annually. The information gathered from these anonymous surveys is used by the staff to develop goals for Spark Academy and to improve the overall quality of care.. A parent/guardian’s point of view is different from a teacher’s point of view. Therefore, feedback is very important to the success of our program and satisfaction of our families.

QUESTIONS/CONCERNS

If you have a question or concern, do not hesitate to bring it to the attention of the teacher most directly involved. If the concern is not resolved, the Director can be reached at 910.685.8280 or lking@Sparkacademync.com. The Director is readily available to assist parents/guardians and staff in resolving any issues.

SPECIAL NEEDS CARE POLICY

Spark Academy is committed to the principle of inclusion and complies with the [Americans with Disabilities Act](#). We are committed to every child equally and commit to learning more about each child’s specific needs and finding the best resources necessary to accomplish our common goal of providing the best care for each child. We believe that including children with special needs can enrich the experience of learning for all children and Spark Academy will make accommodations for children with special needs within the guidelines of ADA.

To assure that we are meeting the individual needs of each child enrolled with an identified a special need, the following procedures and programs are followed:

- Staff receive ongoing training on inclusion and special needs as related to the specific needs of enrolled children.
- Confidentiality of children and families is respected and always maintained.

- Children with special needs will be included and encouraged to participate to the fullest extent of their abilities.
- Staff and families collaborate to meet the individual needs of the child.
- Communication with families is ongoing and is responsive to the needs of families.
- Physical environment is free of barriers.
- A variety of teaching strategies are used to meet the individual needs of each child.
- An individualized special needs care plan will be created with help of the parent/guardian, doctor, teachers, and Spark Academy to ensure that all parties are aware of the care practices which need to be in place.
- The special needs care plan will be completed annually or more frequently at the request of the parent/guardian or child's doctor.

HANDBOOK AGREEMENT

A Spark Academy Parent/Guardian Handbook agreement must be signed and initialed before your child starts their first day.



FAMILY HANDBOOK AGREEMENT SIGNATURE CONFIRMATION

I have read and agree to the terms outlined in the Spark Academy Parent/Guardian Handbook.

(1) Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

(2) Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

Student Name: _____

Classroom: _____