



ST. FRANCIS ACADEMY

PARENT HANDBOOK

2022-2023

Parents are asked to thoroughly read this handbook, discuss it with their children, and sign the last page if in agreement with its guidelines.

ST. FRANCIS ACADEMY

Mission: To assist parents in cultivating wisdom and virtue by nourishing our families on the True, the Good, and the Beautiful.

Vision: As creatures made for union with God, we can only find true fulfillment through an ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ. And that relationship demands engagement from the whole person: body, mind, and soul. In essence, SFA is a community of families united in Christ around a common vision of the good life and a desire to invite other families of goodwill to participate in this vision by forming our children together. In all that we do at SFA – prayer, study, work, and play – we seek to create a rich and fertile soil for God to do His work in cultivating saints.

PILLARS

Christian: Mindful of the Benedictine dictum *ora et labora* – pray and work, we center ourselves in daily prayer and worship by praying together parts of the Liturgy of the Hours and by celebrating feast days and holy days of the Church’s liturgical year.

Collaborative: Assisting parents with practical help in homeschooling through classroom instruction, accountability, and connection with other experienced homeschooling families. SFA is a supportive community taking time to pray, play, and encourage one another in family life, faith, and the formation of our children.

Cultivating: An imagination fed predominantly on the neon glow of screens is weakened by passivity and lack of contact with the real. SFA replaces shallow entertainment and the noise of pop culture with outdoor work, folk music, and poetry – grounding heart, mind, and hands in the deeper beauty of God’s creation. Several outdoor classroom spaces enable us to be outside as much as weather permits, and regular outdoor nature study grounds our science curriculum.

Classical/Charlotte Mason: Our children are whole persons, created to participate in God’s living story of salvation. We reject the gnostic view of education as primarily communicating facts and techniques to a brain. Rather, our goal is to form our children’s habits and appetites in holiness so that they savor and even salivate for the things of God as they grow in relation with His broad and good world. We do this through an atmosphere of beauty and reverence; through the daily disciplines of prayer, study, work, and play; and by feeding our children on living ideas found in the great books of the classical liberal arts tradition.

DISCLAIMER

SFA is a private and independent academy and is not affiliated with any church or other religious organization. SFA families all profess belief in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (with or without the *filioque*). Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox families are all warmly welcomed. SFA is a non-profit business, which is in the process of pursuing 501c(3) status, and designed to offer affordable educational support to families of all sizes. We are open to all students, regardless of race, sex, or national origin.

Motto: “Verbum Caro Factum Est” (John 1:14)

IN PRACTICE

We are a community of families united in Christ around a common vision of the good life and a desire to invite other families of goodwill to participate in this vision by forming our children together in Charlotte Mason's unique philosophy of education. We commit to one another on a yearly basis meeting Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9:00 am to 2:45 pm for outdoor classes in Sanger, Texas. We punctuate our days with morning, noontime, and evening prayer services taken from the Book of Divine Worship. One consistent parent of each family at SFA is actively involved in teaching or supporting a class for the entirety of each school day. Our children (currently ages 0-10) are divided into four age groups. Our <3 youngsters spend their time learning primarily through play: indoor, outdoor, and for an hour in Spanish. They will also enjoy singing, dancing, and instruments in our Musikgarten class. Our 3-5s will likewise have much playtime amid their other classes of Spanish, Phonics, Gardening, Musikgarten, Art, and Physical Education. Our 6+ age group takes part in Spanish, Choir, Folk Dancing, Language Arts, Math Fun, Physical Education, Art, Nature Study, Gardening and can choose between Latin and Handicrafts in the elective hour. A hallmark of our program is enjoying nature through outdoor classes (weather permitting) and the cultivation of God's creation through outdoor work. All children ages 3+ will take part in this according to their ability.

These parents meet the first Monday evening of each month at the Round House to grow our minds, spirits, and our friendship through reading and discussion of Mason's own works or that of another helpful author. Whole families also meet once per term for fellowship, folk dancing, and for the children to showcase some of what they have been working on at SFA.

St. Francis Academy is an intentionally small group of like-minded families who have given each other significant ability to have input into the lives of our children. With such an arrangement, there is always the possibility for (likely unknown) offense between parents or families. Gossip is not tolerated but instead Biblical and gracious exhortation and reconciliation is expected.

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Participation in Other Communities or Cooperatives

St. Francis families should prayerfully consider the impact of cooperative participation on their family schedule. We want families who will joyfully make the time for this community and who will make it a priority. Current and prospective families are encouraged to discuss any concerns about the scheduling prior to renewing membership for the following year.

Experience has shown that families who participate in more than one community or co-op** often find that events overlap, educational philosophies conflict, or their increasingly busy schedules result in exhaustion. Membership in more than one group also takes a place that could be filled by a family who has none and is looking for community. While the timing of our announcement this year might have been such that prior commitments were made, for the future, we ask that families not participate in other educational communities/co-ops while members of St. Francis.

**Activities such as book clubs, scouts, sports, or paid tutoring are not considered educational communities/cooperatives.

Teacher Expectations

To ensure SFA's cohesion, longevity, and atmosphere of hearty learning, we have high expectations of our teachers: we ask that they strive to be examples of Christ for our children; that they arrive promptly to class prepared for their lessons, implementing Mason's principles while teaching; and that they continue growing in her philosophy of education and utilize this in their homes. Families who do not use Mason's methods in their home schools grow children ill-equipped for and, consequently, less benefited by her methods such as oral and written

narration, picture and artist study, wide reading, map study, journaling, book keeping, etc. Authentic sources of CM curriculum include AmblesideOnline, Mason's Alveary, Simply Charlotte Mason, A Delectable Education, and A Gentle Feast among others. In addition to our Round House reading meetings (mentioned above) we expect our teachers to attend at least one educational conference annually and to share an informal summary with the group.

By "growing in CM's philosophy of education" we mean that the family or mother sincerely affirms or assents to these things:

- Has read (or will commit to read) Charlotte Mason VOL 1 (Home Education) or VOL 6 (A Philosophy of Education);
- The primary means of education is through living ideas, presented through living books, solidified in the child's mind through narration, and a healthy dose of time out of doors;
- The primary motivation for learning is love of knowledge, not teacher charisma, rewards, accolades, or rank;
- Cultivates the habit of attention and uses short, varied lessons;
- Draws no separation between the spiritual and the intellectual;
- Actively seeks to grow in knowledge of the Charlotte Mason method (such as through participating in a reading group, attending conferences, listening to relevant podcasts, etc.).

If you are just starting out in this methodology, Liza Yarbrough is happy to make book, resource, and scheduling suggestions, and just generally be of help to you in this effort.

At St. Francis Academy

WE OBEY • WE ENCOURAGE • WE RESPECT • WE REPENT • WE RESTORE

We take seriously the opportunity to teach children the goodness of walking in obedience. Our code of conduct (stated above) is simple yet thorough and, when practiced by all, allows for an atmosphere of order, peace, and joy. This goal directs our student expectations:

- ❖ Children are expected to engage with classes, peers, and authority respectfully.
- ❖ Students address adults by their last names and use "yes, ma'am/sir" when responding to adults.
- ❖ Following Mason's motto for students -- "I am, I can, I ought, I will" -- children are led and expected to take personal responsibility for their actions and for their education.
- ❖ In work, conversation, and play, children should be an encouragement to one another—"to build each other up according to their needs." Foul language is not permitted.
- ❖ Children are expected to be actively inclusive whenever they are gathered.
- ❖ Mothers are empowered to gently, but clearly, correct each other's children in these things.
- ❖ In the case of offense, we insist upon reconciliation. Teachers will lead the child to reflect, repent, and restore. If the child is unrepentant or refuses to make things right, then he will be sent to the headmaster for further conversation and opportunity for restoration.
- ❖ Children should not use smart phones and watches, tablets, game consoles or other screened entertainment or fitness devices when we are gathered for an official SFA activity (school day, field trips, nature outings, or socials).
- ❖ Children should not bring toys from home to school.
- ❖ Teachers should be mindful of their use of devices during official SFA activities yet should feel freedom to use them as needed.

Correcting Student Behavior

Inconsistent consequences do not guide children in righteousness. So, teachers will consistently and gently correct students in three steps:

1. If a student violates one of our 5 principles, the lead teacher will address the student by name, identify the violation, cite the principle, and encourage the right. (E.g. "Johnny, you

are talking while I'm talking. That does not show respect. Please close your mouth and open your ears.")

2. If the disruption continues, the secondary teacher will direct the child to the "contrition corner" where he will spend a few minutes in reflection and prayer. If the student is ready to apologize and return to class anew, he is welcomed back. The teachers will be mindful of the importance of minimizing disruption of the class and embarrassment to the child.
3. If the offending student is unrepentant, the teacher will encourage him to choose the appropriate virtue (i.e. humility, obedience, respect) and allow him some time of conversation with the headmaster to come to this conclusion. Depending on the child's countenance, this might include some physical work to lead the child towards contrition.

Facility Use Guidelines

With St. Francis Academy being located on the personal property of the Wallace and Yarbrough families, they are inherently vulnerable and rely on SFA families to treat their property with respect. If something is damaged, restoration will be pursued with the family or families.

Curriculum Content

The SFA Board has carefully selected the curricula that are on offer and maintains sole discretion over curriculum offerings. The Board affirms that it is, in the final instance, the parents' duty to bring their children up in the fear and admonition of The LORD. St. Francis Academy exists to assist parents in this responsibility. If at any point a parent believes that SFA curricula are in conflict with this end, please bring that to the attention of Liza Yarbrough, the Director of Curriculum.

Inclement Weather

We have arranged alternative classroom space at Green Valley Baptist church, Aubrey. For days in which SFA classes will be held at GVBC, the Board will notify parents by 8:00 pm the day prior. We will seek to strike the balance between hardiness with outdoor classes and classes being nullified by terrible weather. Since we all want resilient children, we will try to err on the classes-out-of-doors side and highly encourage investing in appropriate attire with this in mind. If the weather is considered too dangerous for driving, the affected days will not be "made up."

Illness

St. Francis is a loving community, seeking to serve its neighbors well. Please consider the well-being of others in your decision to attend school. Some explicit guidelines are as follows:

- ❖ If any member of a family has symptoms of a contagious illness, the family will stay home from SFA. If the teaching parent of a child with a cold is able to fulfill teaching responsibilities without herself having symptoms, she is permitted to attend.
- ❖ If you are aware that members of your family have been meaningfully exposed to an illness that is contagious before the onset of symptoms, do not come to class until you are reasonably certain you have not contracted the illness.
- ❖ Symptoms indicating you should stay home include:
 - o Fever greater than 99.9 F
 - o Eye, ear, or colored nasal discharge
 - o Conjunctivitis ("pink eye")
 - o Vomiting or diarrhea
 - o Uncovered open skin wounds or skin lesions that have a moist exudate (ooze)
 - o Viral cough or sore throat (A runny nose or slight cough resulting from post-nasal drip are permitted.)
 - o Active Chicken pox or recent chicken pox vaccine (within 3 days)
 - o Those being treated with antibiotics should be on the medication at least 36 hours prior to returning to SFA.
 - o Skin infections
 - o Impetigo
 - o Cold sores around mouth
 - o Any acute infectious disease

- ❖ If a family member has suffered from the flu, stomach bug**, or strep throat in the 48 hours prior to a class day, the entire family should not attend until the contagion window is closed.
- ❖ If the teaching parent needs to care for a child at home with a non-contagious ailment, she may designate an SFA teaching parent to be responsible for her other children at school.

**We recognize that babies in diapers or potty-training children pose a higher risk of transmitting gastroenteritis. In an effort to prevent affected families from having to miss a month of classes (it stays in the system for up to two weeks), we will instead try being exceedingly fastidious in diaper changing and restroom practices. If there is a case where this seems to have been ineffective the Board will reconsider this policy.

Absences

Parents should notify the group concerning any dates they will be absent. Parents must coordinate coverage, including lesson plans, ideally with the support teacher and inform everyone of these coverage plan in a timely manner. We understand last-minute absences will arise and will do our best to find a solution. If two or more families have to miss on a certain day, we will have to cancel completely.

Dress Code

St. Francis should be a place where young hearts and minds are protected from a world that often encourages children to grow up too quickly. Children are drawing conclusions about right and wrong constantly, and our standards of dress for them and our teachers should reflect modesty and professionalism. This includes wearing bottoms which cover, having no exposed skin between tops and bottoms, avoiding revealing clothing including words on the posterior or other inappropriate or suggestive wording or imagery. If in doubt, please wear something else.

Safety Guidelines

- When not in class, children are the responsibility of the mother and should ask permission from her before leaving a supervised area for an unsupervised area.
- Students may not attend SFA without an approved guardian who will be responsible for the children during non-class times.
- A 6+ child who engages in behavior that poses a threat of physical harm to himself or to others will see the headmaster who will address the behavior with the child and determine when he is safe to return.
- Fastidious hygiene precautions will be taken with diaper changes (see illnesses section).
- Appropriate hand hygiene will be observed.
- Mothers will be called to manage potty accidents of their own children.
- If an adult other than the child's mother is assisting a child in the bathroom, the bathroom door will remain open. Fathers and other visiting adults will not change diapers or assist in the bathroom for children other than their own.
- Parents are welcome to photograph their children during SFA-sponsored activities. Such photos or videos cannot be shared publicly, including through social media, without express permission from each photographed family.
- Only a child's mother can administer any type of medication including essential oils.

Prospective Member Policy

The selection of new families includes a meeting with board members, a scheduled day of observation by the prospective teaching parent alone (no children to avoid undue disruption), and a completed application. If you know of an interested family please connect them with Liza Yarbrough or Marianna Wallace who will begin this process.

Financial/Payment Policy

Tuition for all children must be paid in full for a family's membership to be confirmed. Once paid, these fees are non-refundable. Tuition is not required for newborns until the child needs meaningful care apart from the mother. In which case, tuition for the baby will be prorated. Families with more than 4 students only pay tuition for 4, with their attending siblings being free.

I have read and discussed this handbook with my child. We are eager to begin our participation in St. Francis Academy as described above.

Sincerely,

Printed Parent Name _____

Parent Signature _____

1. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

2. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

3. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

4. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

5. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

6. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

7. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

8. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____

9. Printed Child Name _____

Child Signature _____