2026-2027 Family Handbook

411 S. Burrowes Street
State College, PA 16801
814-237-1585
E-mail: occmontessori@gmail.com
www.occmontessori.org

The mission of Our Children's Center is to educate children in a dynamic, warm, engaging, responsive, multi-cultural environment designed both to stimulate and to nurture them; to support and fairly compensate a highly-skilled professional staff; to promote and maintain a diverse student and staff population; and to foster a strong sense of community among families.

Updated: 8/2026

Dear Families,

Welcome to Our Children's Center Montessori School! Your child, and indeed, your entire family are part of a special early childhood education program: a school committed to the positive development of children, parents, and staff. Our Children's Center is a community-centered school whose mission is to offer the highest quality Montessori education for all children.

At OCC, we aim to enroll not only a child but the family. We hope that you will take advantage of the school's social and community-building events. Parental participation is a vital component of our program. We firmly believe that we can not educate your child without you. Through Community Group or Board participation, volunteering (either in the classroom or out), or attending school functions, your involvement enriches our school community, and we hope the experience of being part of OCC will enrich your life, as well.

This Family Handbook contains important information regarding OCC's policies and procedures. Each family receives a website link to access/download the handbook upon entry to the program and should review it at least annually throughout their family's enrollment. Should alterations to the content be required, parents will be notified.

Please review your Family Handbook carefully, and sign the Acknowledgement of Receipt prior to the start of the school year in August. As always, please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Your children are our source of inspiration, awe, and wonder. Let us begin the year together with excitement and anticipation.

Sincerely,

Rebekah Carswell
Head of School

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An Introduction

Our Children's Center (OCC) is a private, non-profit Montessori preschool and kindergarten. We welcome families from diverse religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Located in downtown State College, OCC offers a variety of 5-day educational programs with half and full day options for children ages 6 months to 6 years.

Montessori education uses a "whole child" approach with activities designed to promote social skills, emotional and cognitive growth, and physical coordination. Teachers prepare the classroom environment so that the activities presented are attractive to children, developmentally appropriate, multi-sensorial, and self-correcting.

Most of the learning is self-directed. Respect for self, others, and the environment is a core Montessori principle. The goal of the Montessori educational philosophy is to develop autonomous, competent, empathetic, responsible problem-solvers who will make a positive impact on the world.

Our Board of Directors oversees the school's budget and ensures that the school's goals and programs are aligned with our mission. The OCC Board of Directors employs a Head of School to organize and supervise the school's programs.

Rebekah Carswell is the school's Head of School, charged with ensuring the smooth day-to-day functioning of the school, meeting the licensing regulations for both the PA Department of Human Services and the PA Department of Education, curriculum and staff development, grant writing and creating systems for continuous quality improvement for our program. Pattie Wingreen serves as the Office Manager and is responsible for student registration and records, accounting, and assisting with daily operations.

"If we could say, 'We are respectful and courteous in our dealing with children--we treat them as we would like to be treated ourselves,' we should have mastered a great educational principle and be setting an example of a good education." ~ Maria Montessori

General Information

Hours	OCC opens our Before School Program at 7:45 am and closes the After School Program at 5:15 pm, Monday through Friday.
Phone & Email	814-237-1585 occmontessori@gmail.com - Main Office occofficefinance@gmail.com - Office Administrator (Ms. Patty) occheadofschool@gmail.com - Head of School (Ms. Rebekah) occtoddlercoordinator@gmail.com - Nido/Toddler Level (Ms. Abbie) occprimarycoordinator@gmail.com - Primary Level Ms. Bonnie)
Contacting Us	The OCC office is typically staffed between the hours of 8:00 am and 4:30 pm. Please note, however, that our jobs take us to all parts of the building. Should you need to reach us, please feel free to email or leave a voicemail message; messages are checked frequently.
Non-discrimination Policy	Admissions, the provisions of services, and referrals of clients shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, sexual orientation, or gender identity/expression. Program services shall be made accessible to eligible persons with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to, equipment redesign, the provision of aides, and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods. Any individual/client/student (and/or their guardian), who believes they have been discriminated against, may file a complaint of discrimination with the following: Department of Public Welfare; Bureau of Equal Opportunity Room 223, Health and Welfare Building PO Box 2675 Harrisburg, PA 17105

Our Children's Center Mission

The mission of Our Children's Center is to educate children in a dynamic, warm, engaging, responsive, multi-cultural environment designed both to stimulate and to nurture them; to support and fairly compensate a highly-skilled professional staff; to promote and maintain a diverse student and staff population; and to foster a strong sense of community among families.

To support this mission, Our Children's Center will:

- Support Montessori teachers by providing appropriate materials and facilities in the service of creating a thoughtfully prepared environment for the children;
- Encourage an interconnected network of learning opportunities among students, staff, and parents by offering parenting workshops, avenues for professional development, and ways for community members to share their expertise with our students;
- Develop and maintain a climate of grace and courtesy, kinship, and respect among students and the adults who educate them;
- Facilitate relationships among families through regular written and oral communication between school and home, service projects, volunteer and leadership opportunities, support and interest groups and social events;
- Showcase the strengths of the Montessori philosophy of early childhood education by exemplifying the tenets of the philosophy in practice;
- Fund scholarships that create educational opportunities for Montessori-minded families with financial need.

The Montessori Philosophy

Respect is at the core of the Montessori philosophy-- respect for oneself, for others, for life, and for the environment. Ground rules and behavioral expectations for both children and adults in Montessori settings are based upon these tenets.

Specific educational practices common to most Montessori programs include multi-age groupings, beautiful and carefully designed learning environments, emphasis on teacher observation and research, a focus on the development of the "whole child", children's selection of materials from within an appropriate range, and clear social and behavioral expectations.

In all aspects of learning, children move at their own pace, repeating activities until a sense of inner mastery moves them on to the next level of difficulty. A rich array of hands-on materials is offered, engaging the child in learning on many levels.

- Practical Life activities-- e.g., hand washing, sweeping, and sewing-- develop children's hand-eye coordination, sense of sequence, and ability to remain with the entire cycle of an activity. Practical Life materials enable children to learn how to care for themselves and the environment.

- The Sensorial materials-- a wide variety of grading, sorting, and sensory discrimination activities develop children's perceptual abilities and refine their observation skills.

- Literacy and Mathematical activities-- these two other well-developed curriculum areas permeate all aspects of classroom life.

- Science and Cultural experiences enable the child to view the world's similarities and differences and to relish life on this planet.

- Music and movement offer the child vehicles for personal expression and joy. Throughout the school year, curriculum materials are continually revised and expanded in response to the children's changing needs and interests.

- Open-ended materials-- blocks, sand, dramatic play, and art media-- encourage exploration and self-expression while allowing each child to impose their organizational style upon the process.

In order to design and facilitate learning in these highly-individualized environments, Montessori teachers must be well prepared. They need a complete understanding of child development and the Montessori curriculum, as well as excellent observation and communication skills. Ongoing professional development is required of all staff and tailored to individual needs and interests.

OCC Expectations

School-wide expectations help children become independent in the environment and aid in the development of the school as a peaceful community.

We list the following OCC expectations below to enhance parent/guardian awareness. Please reinforce these rules when in your child's company at school. Additionally, be aware that many of the ground rules apply to everyone, including children, staff, and parents/guardians.

The following are the general ground rules at Our Children's Center:

- Use quiet walking feet.
- While walking in the hallways, stay near an adult.
- Enter only classroom spaces in which you are invited.
- Use an inside, gentle voice inside the school.
- Touch another child's work only when invited.
- Work together with another child only when invited.
- Keep your hands to your own body.
- Play with different friends each day-share your friendship.
- Wash hands upon entering the classroom, before and after eating, and after using the restroom.
- Put your materials away when finished so they are ready for the next person.
- Interrupt politely (when necessary) by gently placing a hand on a teacher's shoulder or arm and waiting for eye contact.
- Take care of each other, the materials, the environment, and our world.

Good Neighbors

In addition to these rules, we strive to maintain a healthy, respectful relationship with University Baptist and Brethren Church, our landlord. Please do not allow children to climb on the outside stone walls, and remind them to treat the landscaping with care. Respecting landscaping includes no picking of flowers, leaves, or grass, and no hanging from tree branches. Feet should remain on the sidewalks or grass outside, avoiding any mulched areas.

No Toys Please

We ask that children not bring toys or other items from home into school as they often become a source of confusion and heartache in the classroom. It is also difficult to keep track of these items and ensure that they are safely returned home at the end of the day. Please explain to your child that some things are for school and some things are just for home. Items found in nature, however, are always welcome.

Respectful Conduct and Anti-Harassment

At Our Children's Center, we are committed to maintaining a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all children, families, and staff. To ensure a positive community experience for everyone, we do not tolerate any form of harassment, intimidation, or bullying—whether in person, in writing, or online.

What Constitutes Harassment

Harassment includes, but is not limited to:

- Verbal abuse, shouting, or rude language
- Disrespectful or threatening behavior toward staff, other parents, or children
- Repeated unwanted contact or gossiping
- Discriminatory or offensive remarks based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, disability, or any other protected characteristic

Expectations for Families

We expect all parents and guardians to:

- Treat each other, staff, and children with kindness and respect
- Address concerns directly with school leadership rather than other families
- Refrain from using school events, meetings, or digital platforms (e.g., class apps, group chats, social media) to engage in negative or hostile communication

Reporting & Resolution

If you experience or witness behavior that violates this policy, please notify the Head of School or a Level Coordinator immediately. All reports will be handled discreetly and in accordance with our school's collaborative conflict resolution practices.

Consequences

Failure to adhere to this policy may result in a warning, a meeting with administration, or—if necessary—restriction of participation in school events or activities. In extreme cases, continued enrollment may be reviewed.

Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

Attendance and Sign-In/Sign-Out Procedures

Every child should be healthy and pass a temperature check before arriving at school, which helps to keep our school community safe. **Daily sign-in and sign-out is required by PA state law.** Parents MUST complete this process as the child enters the building, and should sign-out promptly upon dismissal. For the safety of our children, you will be asked to show proof of sign-in and sign-out if you are unable to comply on a consistent basis.

Please fill out the Attendance Form located in the OCC app no later than 8:30 am on the day your child will be absent. Give the reason for the absence so that we may record it in our illness tracking log. Additional information regarding illness policy and procedures can be found on page 18.

It is important that children regularly attend school. If your child will be absent for long periods of time, please notify the classroom and the office. If you know in advance that your child will not be at school on a particular day (including vacations, appointments, late arrivals, or early dismissals), please let us know, via the Attendance Form, in advance.

Drop-off and Pick-up Locations

We offer two options for arrival and dismissal. The Car Line is located at the rear alley entrance. Walking/biking families and those who choose to park and walk children to the door can use the front Burrowes Courtyard doorway. If you need a longer goodbye, please park your car and walk your child to our front entrance. We need to keep the car line moving smoothly and efficiently during arrival and dismissal.

Car Line Procedures

- We are reversing the direction of our carline to reduce congestion on Burrowes St. and to allow cars to exit via Fraser St. This change will take effect on the first day of school.
- Drive on Nittany Ave. away from Burrowes, and turn right onto F Alley (at the end of the playscape). Pull forward as far as you are able in the alley. When leaving, turn left onto Robin Alley (the “T” intersection at the end of F Alley) and left again onto Fraser St.
- For arrival, children should have their belongings packed and ready near the carseat. Please unload your child and walk them to the entrance/stairs.
- At dismissal, you will be responsible for picking your child up at the entrance/stairs, loading them into the car, and buckling them into their carseat.
- Enter and exit the vehicle in a timely manner so that the line continues to move forward.

Front Door Procedures

- If using the front entrance, please walk your child down into the courtyard and to the door. Please also walk down into the courtyard to pick them up rather than standing at the top of the stairs.
- Street parking is available along both sides of Burrowes Street. We recommend utilizing both the 300 and 400 blocks.
- A bike rack is available at the front of our building for bikes, trailers, strollers, scooters, etc. to park. You are welcome to leave items at the rack throughout the day.

Classroom Arrivals

It is important that your child arrive on time for their session - we are a school and not simply a childcare center. Young children are comforted by regular routines. The familiarity of predictable rhythm and routines helps them feel secure in the environment. When the children enter the classroom together they are able to make better work choices and work freely, without interruption. The child who enters late, often alone, may feel disengaged or left out from the group and this feeling can also flow into other parts of their day. Being on time shows your child that they are important, school is important, and respecting the community is important.

We regard this initial greeting and orientation time as highly valuable; it can set the tone for the rest of the day. Consistently arriving late, when all the children are already busy working, can be anxiety-producing for some children. It also forces teachers to stop lessons and move away from the majority of children in order to transition the late child into the room. We expect children at school within 15 minutes of arrival time (no later than 9:00 am). After 9:00 am, the Car Line closes. You will need to park and walk your child to the front entrance (and to their classroom if staff are otherwise engaged).

Why say goodbye at the door?

Saying "goodbye" to your child at the door is sometimes difficult for your child and for you. You may be tempted to follow your child into the building or classroom to say goodbye; this practice, however, may make your child feel less secure and lengthen the time it takes them to settle into the classroom.

We encourage you to say a brief farewell at the school entrance, modeling a cheerful attitude so that your child does not sense any ambivalence on your part. Sometimes, a child creates a small goodbye ritual, doing everything in the same order before entering school. Keeping your goodbye ritual outside the classroom helps your child move into the classroom space and separate from you more easily.

Transitions as a Time of Connection

Transitions can sometimes be difficult for young children, but they are also an opportunity for meaningful connection with your child. We believe that giving your child your full attention for those few minutes at arrival and dismissal is very important. No matter how the start of the day unfolded, slowing down for a minute in the morning when you reach the school entrance can calm everyone and allow for a more peaceful goodbye. Be ready without distraction when you greet your child at the end of their school session. Put away your phones, and be present with your child!

Classroom Dismissals

It is important that your child be picked up on time. It can be a frightening experience for a small child to be left at the school after their routine departure time. Late pick-ups also interrupt staff schedules - we need prompt pickups for staff dismissals and to maintain proper ratios.

If an unexpected situation arises and you cannot pick up your child on time, please notify us as soon as possible so we can explain to your child why you are late. Please call the school rather than email so that we have time to make necessary arrangements.

General Daily Routines

Toddler

8:45 am - 9:00 am	Morning Arrival
8:45 am - 10:15 am	Morning Work Cycle
10:30 am - 11:15 am	Outdoor Play
11:30 am - 12:15 pm	Lunch, Begin Nap
12:10 pm - 12:15 pm	Half Day Dismissal
12:15 pm - 3:00 pm	Nap
3:10 pm - 3:15 pm	School Day Dismissal

Primary

8:45 am - 9:00 am	Morning Arrival
8:45 am - 11:15 am	Morning Work Cycle
11:30 am - 12:15 pm	Outdoor Play
12:10 pm - 12:15 pm	Half Day Dismissal
12:15 pm - 1:00 pm	Lunch, Begin Rest
1:00 pm - 1:30 pm	Rest/Nap
1:30 pm - 3:00 pm	Afternoon Session/Nap
3:10 pm - 3:15 pm	School Day Dismissal

Before School Program

Our Before School Program is held in the Big Room. You are able to drop off any time from 7:45 am to 8:40 am. Children might choose to help teachers with tasks to prepare for the day, or play with open-ended activities such as blocks, marble runs, and legos. Please do not arrive between 8:40 and 8:45 as children are transitioning to classrooms at this time. Ideally, students should arrive by 8:30 as it can be difficult for children to arrive into the Big Room and then almost immediately need to start cleaning up (8:35) for the 8:40 transition time.

If your child is in Before School, you will need to ring the front or back doorbells for drop-off. We don't always have a staff member in the lobby before 8:45 am.

After School Program

Our After School Program is held in the Big Room or outdoors depending on weather. You are able to pick up your child any time from 3:30 pm to 4:15 pm, or 3:30 pm to 5:15 pm, depending on which option you choose. Snacks are offered to all children after the school day dismissal. Please do not pick up between our school day dismissal at 3:15 and 3:30, as this is when children are changing their shoes, packing their belongings, and eating a snack. During After School, our focus is on FUN! We have open-ended items to encourage creative play, gross motor activities, and games. Students also regularly enjoy special projects and crafts. We will attempt to play outside as often as possible.

If your child is in After School, you can call the school when you are on your way with an ETA and we will try to have your child ready when you arrive. Otherwise, please ring the doorbell when you arrive, or find us outside!

Supplies for School

Inside Appropriate Shoes

All children should have a pair of "indoor shoes" to wear within the classrooms. These shoes should be easily put on and off by the child independently. No slippers please. Please plan for these shoes to remain at OCC.

Outside Appropriate Shoes

Children should wear weather appropriate shoes to school each day. All footwear should be comfortable and sturdy. For your child's safety, we strongly recommend sneakers as the safest footwear for active play. Children trip easily in sandals and dress shoes, and boots are really only best for rainy, muddy, or snowy weather. Ideally, shoe choices should be ones that your child is able to put on and off themselves with minimal adult assistance. We discourage flip-flops, or other types of loose- fitting footwear for outdoor wear at school.

Backpack

Every child should have a backpack that is large enough to hold a standard folder for papers (8.5x11), and any other items traveling to and from school each day.

Clothing Choices

Children are working on independence with toileting and clothing changes. Soft, loose fitting cotton shorts, pants, and shirts are comfortable and easiest for children to manage on their own. Tight jeans or leggings, clothing with buttons or snaps, etc all can be difficult to manipulate.

During the day, your child may work with water, mud, glue, paint, or other "messy" items. School clothes should be "work clothes" and ones that you and/or your child are comfortable with staining or sending home to wash.

Spare Clothing

At minimum, two full sets of clothing (socks, underwear, shirt, pants) should be kept at school. Please check regularly to ensure that your child's spare clothing is season appropriate and the correct size. If your child is in extended care programming, please send an additional full set of clothing in a gallon ziploc bag labeled with their name. If your child is working on, or new, to toilet learning it is helpful to have multiple pairs of socks, underwear, and pants on hand. As each set of dirty clothes comes home, please send clean replacements. Please label all items.

Warm and Cold Weather Gear

In order to take full advantage of our outdoor spaces, we ask families to provide weather-appropriate outdoor gear that can support their safety and comfort during outside play. These items should remain at school so that they are on hand when needed. Please see the next section for more details.

OCC Play and Excursions

Spending time outside and in open-ended play is an important part of our school day. Lots of learning happens outdoors, and our classrooms move outside daily unless the weather is inclement or there is an air quality alert. Air quality conditions that pose a significant health risk shall be identified by announcements from local health authorities and the AccuWeather website. OCC uses the AccuWeather website in order to make the decision about going outside to play or if we will stay indoors regarding temperature (and real feel/heat index) limits.

Warm Weather

In warmer weather, we will go outside on all days that the temperature is below 95 F (including heat index). When the temperature or heat index is above 95 F, we may still spend time outside with additional precautions (shortened length of time, shade accommodations, additional water play, etc). Please send your children to school prepared for the weather. Temperature appropriate clothing and rain gear will help ensure that we can take full advantage of our playscape and the community surrounding our OCC school building.

Children shall be well-hydrated and be encouraged to drink water during activity. Special precautions shall be taken between 10am and 4pm during the summer months or warm weather (generally, mid-May to mid-September) to protect children from the sun. Sun protection should include shade, sun-protective clothing, and sunscreen. OCC provides/uses Banana Boat Sensitive Mineral 50+SPF Sunscreen (100% mineral, no oxybenzone or parabens, UVA/UVB broad spectrum, accepted by the National Eczema Association) with permission. Families who decline this permission must provide their own sunscreen that meets the UVA/UVB 50+ requirement.

Warm Weather Gear

In warm weather, children's clothing should be light-colored, lightweight, and limited to one layer of absorbent material to facilitate the evaporation of sweat. Children are encouraged to wear a hat or cap with a brim that faces forward to shield the face, and child safe, shatter resistant sunglasses with at least 99% UV protection.

We go outside daily, even if the ground is wet/muddy or it is drizzling. Plan to keep, at minimum, a pair of rain boots (or crocs) and a raincoat at school so that they can always fully participate in outdoor play. Please be sure that all outdoor gear is labeled**.**

Cold Weather

During the winter, we take all of the children outside on days when the temperature is above 15F (this includes the wind chill factor and/or real-feel temperature). When the temperature or real-feel is below 15 F, we may still spend time outside with additional precautions (shortened length of time, additional layers, etc). Please send your children to school prepared for the weather. Temperature appropriate clothing and winter gear will help ensure that we can take full advantage of our playscape and the community surrounding our OCC school building.

Cold Weather Gear

When the weather turns cold, teachers will check children's extremities for maintenance of

normal color and warmth at least every 15 minutes when children are outdoors. Toddlers often require one additional layer than what an adult finds comfortable. Children's clothing should be layered and dry. Try to have them wear warm pants. If your child does not want to wear pants, please send in a pair of sweatpants to wear over tights, leggings, or lightweight pants. Plan to keep, at minimum, a pair of snow pants, warm snow boots (not rain boots), a hat, and gloves or mittens at school so that they can always fully participate in outdoor play. Please be sure that all winter gear is labeled**.**

Outdoor Play

Our playscape and back yard are beautiful, functional, and fun. We have stones, large and small wooden blocks, large tires, pipes, water pumps, sand, dirt, and many accessories to support creative and dramatic play. There are planters for the children to maintain, growing flowers, herbs, and vegetables enjoyed by the school. Teachers lead structured activities to promote children's interaction with and within our outdoor spaces, and also encourage children to explore freely and independently.

Outdoor Air Quality and Outdoor Play Guidance

OCC will use particulate matter (PM2.5) levels and corresponding Air Quality Index (AQI) values to determine when outdoor activities, including recess, should be limited or moved indoors. PM2.5 is measured in micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) and is the basis for AQI values commonly reported in weather apps. As a guideline, outdoor play will proceed as normal when PM2.5 is below 12 µg/m³ (AQI 0–50). When PM2.5 reaches 12–35 µg/m³ (AQI 51–100), outdoor activity may be modified or shortened. When PM2.5 exceeds 35 µg/m³ (AQI above 100), including during events such as wildfire smoke, OCC will keep children indoors and minimize outdoor exposure. Decisions will be based on real-time conditions and may be adjusted to ensure the health and safety of students and staff.

Indoor Play

The All-purpose room, known as the Big Room, is also utilized as an indoor play area with gross-motor activities supervised by teachers. We have a tumbling mat, climbers, scooters, stationary "exercise" equipment, building sets, dramatic play materials, and many other fun activities for the children.

Indoor Air Quality Monitoring

OCC runs HEPA air filtration units in all areas of the school when the building is occupied. Indoor conditions are monitored using portable air quality devices, tracking carbon dioxide (CO_2), particulate matter (PM2.5), volatile organic compounds (VOCs), carbon monoxide (CO), radon, temperature, and humidity. OCC uses established health-based reference ranges to guide operations, including: PM2.5 levels of 0–12 µg/m³ (AQI 0–50, good), 12–35 µg/m³ (AQI 51–100, moderate), and >35 µg/m³ (AQI >100, elevated); CO_2 levels below 800 ppm (well-ventilated) and above 1,200 ppm (action required); VOCs maintained at low levels (generally <500 ppb preferred, with action taken if significantly elevated); CO levels at 0 ppm expected and ≥9 ppm requiring immediate action; radon levels below 4.0 pCi/L; temperature maintained between 68–75°F; and relative humidity between 30–60%. HVAC systems are maintained through routine inspection and filter replacement (minimum MERV 11, or higher if

supported).

If monitored conditions fall outside acceptable ranges, OCC will take appropriate corrective action, including increasing ventilation, operating additional portable HEPA filtration units, reducing or eliminating pollutant sources, or modifying activities. In cases of significantly elevated readings (e.g., PM2.5 >35 µg/m³, CO ≥9 ppm, or radon ≥4.0 pCi/L), immediate mitigation steps will be taken. The Health & Safety Committee will periodically review IAQ data and adjust practices to ensure continuous improvement.

Walks

Our Primary students frequently enjoy walks around the neighborhood. Toddlers will sometimes take short walks, utilizing strollers as needed for the youngest students. Occasionally, we venture as far as the Nittany Lion Shrine, the Alumni Gardens Duck Pond, or the Farmer's Market on Locust Lane. We enjoy our neighborhood and the wonderful attributes of being located in the State College Borough. All families are asked to sign a walking field trip consent at enrollment.

Field Trips

As part of our educational program, we occasionally take groups of children on excursions into the community. The opportunity to go on field trips depends upon each child's age, level of maturity, and interests. We view the three-year primary cycle as a continuum & plan field trips accordingly.

Younger children need to focus on "the basics" of familiarity with routines, materials, teachers, and expectations; hence, they may go on only one field trip, perhaps to a park. Older, more mature children usually have these basics under their belts and are ready and eager for more frequent and diverse community experiences. All families are notified of pending excursions and permission is requested prior to the event.

Walking Field Trips

Several of our destinations are within walking distance of OCC. Even so, if we are to enter a facility, we are required to get your signed permission for your child to join us. Examples of "Walking Field Trips" would be a trip to Schlow Library or Alpha Fire Company.

Food at OCC

Nutrition is an integral part of the daily program at OCC. Our goals include increasing children's acceptance of a wide variety of foods and promoting good eating habits for optimal physical and mental development. Children also develop fine motor skills and independence as they learn to prepare a variety of foods in the classroom and take responsibility for setting, using, and cleaning table-settings.

As in most aspects of a well-prepared Montessori environment, "kitchen" areas are designed with the children at the center. Tables and chairs are proportionate to the size of the children in the classroom and allow freedom of movement to sit and stand with ease. Tableware, utensils, and materials used for food preparation are sized for the children's use. This aspect of a child's growth can be supported at home by the offering of open cups and utensils at all meal times.

OCC is a NUT-FREE school.

An understanding of peanut/tree-nut allergies is essential to the health and safety of the children attending OCC. In some cases, allergies are so severe that a child can even react to airborne allergens, as well as when they come into contact with skin. As a safety precaution, when your children enter the classroom each morning, they will be asked to wash hands and faces at the sink.

Water/Hydration

In keeping with promoting healthy habits, water is available to drink with snacks and throughout the day. We have water stations available with fresh, filtered water in all classrooms and gross motor spaces (both indoors and outside). Children do not need to bring a water bottle to school, with the exception of summer sessions.

Snack Time

Snack time provides an excellent opportunity for working toward our nutritional goals. Typically, each classroom is served one carbohydrate and either a fruit, vegetable or dairy product. Children are active participants in food preparation and setting up their snack area each day. We have a well-equipped "pantry" for teachers and students with juicers, peelers, mixers, blenders, knives, measuring cups, bowls, and everything needed for a wide variety of healthy food prep. Snacks are available for self-service, available near a table, designated as the snack table in the classroom. Children monitor their own hunger level to determine when they will have a snack.

Lunch Time

Mealtimes are a time of community and learning and should be an enjoyable experience. Family style meal service is used, with children responsible for setting tables, serving food, and cleaning up following each meal. Teachers sit at tables and eat with the children, encouraging social interaction and conversation about the events of the day. Discussion might also surround concepts of color, quantity, number, temperature, and texture or flavors of food. OCC prepares and provides lunch daily for all toddlers and all full-day primary students. Each lunch includes an entrée, vegetables, and fruit. Extra assistance and time will be provided for slower eaters and so that all children might successfully serve themselves to make family style dining possible

without contamination or waste of food.

Zero Waste & Environmental Considerations

OCC is aiming to become a Zero-Waste facility and minimize our overall impact on our local (and global) environment. In doing so, we prepare minimally processed and minimally packaged foods and compost all food scraps. Snacks and lunches are served in reusable glass and metal containers, and all food is eaten on glass plates with glass drinkware and metal utensils. We source our food locally whenever possible, growing many of our own vegetables and herbs and utilizing local producers. We serve a limited amount of meat, and buy our beef from a local free-range pastured, organic, grass fed (and finished) farm.

Illness Policies and Procedures

Illness-Onset at Home

Your child's health is very important to us. Please use the Attendance Form in the OCC app by 8:30 am to let us know when your child is going to be absent due to illness. When you call the school to inform us of an absence, or when you receive a diagnosis for your child, please let us know. You can email or leave a voicemail message about your child's symptoms and/or illness. We are required to track illnesses in a log at school.

Please keep your child at home until they are fever-free, without medication, for at least 24 hours, and show substantially reduced symptoms. This 24-hour period ensures that your child is fully recovered and not contagious before returning to school. As a general rule, if your child is not well enough to participate fully in the day's activities (and this includes outside play), they should stay at home. Cough is a frequent lingering symptom that causes a lot of confusion. A good rule of thumb is to wait until the period between coughs is 5 or more minutes.

Illness-Onset at School

If your child becomes ill at OCC, we will call you to arrange for immediate pick-up. If we cannot reach you, we will call the individuals listed as your emergency contacts. We will keep your child in the office under staff supervision, until you arrive.

We will call you if your child has one or more of these symptoms:

- A temperature of 100.4 degrees or more
- A temperature of 99.0 - 100.3 with behavior changes
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- An unexplained rash
- Symptoms of a communicable disease
- Unusual or persistent drowsiness
- Unusual and persistent behavior change
- Wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Evidence of head lice or discovery of a tick bite

Illness Safety Plan

OCC has more detailed guidance on when to stay home and return to school policies for respiratory and other illnesses in our "Illness Safety Plan." Our Illness Safety Plan can be found on the Transparent Classroom Home page in the "School Info" section, on our website, and in the OCC App. The information included in the policy is for your reference and to gain an understanding of our overall expectations surrounding illnesses and safe return to school.

Parent/School Communication

Communication from School to Home

OCC uses Transparent Classroom for attendance, sharing photos, and tracking each child's work and activities. To help you stay informed with the happenings at OCC, all parents can expect weekly classroom reflections, and periodic school-wide emails. ~~The OCC website (www.occmontessori.org) has additional information such as the school calendar, lunch menus, forms, and other great information for both new and current families.~~ The Head of School sends a weekly message on Sundays to the full school so that there is regular, clear communication throughout all stakeholders in our community.

OCC App

OCC utilizes the "One-Spot" OCC App as a hub for information and communication from the school. The OCC App houses our calendar, lunch menu, health forms, messaging groups, and many other resources for families. We use the OCC App for urgent messages sent to both phones (via text and/or voice), app notifications on phones, and email. Weather closures, early dismissals, or other important reminders will often be sent via the OCC App. It is required that all parents/guardians join the OCC App and allow push notifications via the app for timely communication.

Keeping the Lines of Communication Open

The importance of communication and understanding between teachers and parents cannot be overemphasized. Each adult sees the child in a different setting and all different times of the day, consequently seeing different facets of his/her personality. Knowing about changes (e.g. moving, new baby, grandparents visiting) can greatly help us in understanding shifts in the child's behavior and attitudes in school.

While we are strongly of the mindset that the staff should be open and available for parent/guardian - teacher communications, sometimes such conversations during the school day can be difficult. Arrival and dismissal is also not an appropriate time for an in-depth conversation as our attention should be focused on the child and their transition to/from families. If you would like additional feedback on how your child is doing, or simply have questions, feel free to send a note to teachers via Transparent Classroom, send an email to the classroom, or a message via the OCC App.Your child's teacher will respond as quickly as possible. If needed, you may speak with the Level Coordinator (either Infant/Toddler or Primary), or the Head of School in person, on the phone, or via email.

Conferences

Parent-teacher conferences are available for all parents/guardians two times each year, with additional conferences if needed. Please see the current school calendar for scheduled conference days. Sign-ups will be available as each conference time nears. Conferences are an important time for parents/guardians and teachers to connect. We expect you to prioritize this opportunity both in the fall and in the spring. If you have concerns that you would like to share about your child before your conference time, please contact your child's teacher, the Level Coordinator, and/or the Head of School.

Progress Reports

Written progress reports for each child are sent home three times during the school year. These offer an additional source of detailed information regarding your child's experience in the classroom, academic progress and overall development. We will utilize classroom observations, the Ages and Stages Developmental Screening Tool, as well as student portfolios to provide parents/guardians with a comprehensive view of their child's progress and development.

The Growing and Developing Child

Self-Direction

At OCC, we encourage and expect children to become self-sufficient in many ways. From remembering to put away a work before getting out another work, to helping clean up a spill, to learning ways to tell another child that they wish to work alone, every day provides countless opportunities for your child to gain independence at an appropriate level. Children change their own shoes, coats, and clothing, serve themselves food, eat independently, and clean up.

You may be surprised at the many activities your child will start to do at home after attending OCC for a time. Children who are most successful and make the greatest progress in a Montessori classroom are often those who have consistency of routine and support for independence and self-direction not only at school but in the home.

Toilet Learning

In toileting, as in all aspects of daily living, we encourage a child's natural progression toward independence. Independence occurs in stages if the child receives appropriate support and practice along the way. Please remember: it is toilet **learning**. Learning takes time and practice much like anything else in life. It can bring extra frustration because it is messy, but please allow your child time to work on this process without high expectations.

In the Nido (Infant) environment, children who are able to sit up independently will be offered the toilet at each diaper change as an introduction to toilet learning. There is no expectation of "success" at this age, merely exposure to the concept of toileting and normalizing the process and routine.

In the Toddler environment, children will wear underwear. They will be offered the opportunity to sit on the toilet frequently in the early stages of toilet learning. To assist in this process of self-care, it's most beneficial for students to have loose fitting clothing that is easy to pull up or down. Diapers will still be used at naptime for those requiring them.

Our expectation is that parents will work with us to support their child's growth toward independence in toileting. There is a bathroom in each toddler classroom. Children in the Primary classrooms are supervised when they use the hallway bathrooms. Children in Primary classrooms are expected to wear underwear and use the toilet consistently, or at the very least, be actively working on toilet learning. We do not "hold" children from transitioning to Primary if toilet learning is one of or the only developmental factor hindering readiness. That said, if a Primary child is not fully toilet trained, they will be invoiced at the Toddler rate due to the additional resources and staffing required for toilet training and cleaning.

Developmental Screening and Assessment

OCC uses the Ages and Stages Questionnaires as a developmental screening tool. This is an important resource for our teachers to gain knowledge of a child's social and emotional and cognitive development. All new students in a classroom will receive an ASQ screening within

the first 45 days. Parents/Guardians are asked to fill out the same questionnaires to provide additional information from the home environment and family perspective. Results will be discussed with parents at initial conferences, and will help staff identify children who may need additional support.

Inclusive Environment

Teachers use developmentally appropriate practices and consider the unique needs of all children when planning. When a child demonstrates speech, learning, physical, or behavioral exceptionalities, difficulties, or delays, it is up to the classroom teachers, along with the Head of School, to closely observe and document the child's behavior. In order to support the child, the teachers will make every attempt to adapt or modify the activities and environment to meet the child's needs. Parents/guardians will be notified of concerns and, working together with the school's administration, a plan will be created to address concerns.

Following the initial adaptations and modifications, parents/guardians may be referred to additional family and community outreach to support the child's needs. Resources will be made available to the family. The OCC staff will encourage and assist with any and all support within our capacity, working in partnership with families to work for progress in growth and development. As early education professionals, we strongly desire family support for seeking assessments, establishing behavior modification plans, or exploring other strategies when requested by teachers.

Collaboration with Other Professionals

Many children with disabilities or other special needs are supported by developmental and educational professionals such as therapists, teachers, and others. OCC welcomes those professionals and works with them to assure the child's success. The service provider is encouraged to provide services in the context of the classroom environment and the child's teacher and the service provider work collaboratively to determine the best strategies to support the child in the group educational setting. OCC supports the teacher's participation in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and/or Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. Schedules, routines, and activities are flexible and teachers will work with therapists, special educators, and other professionals to integrate individual accommodations, modifications and strategies into classroom routines and activities. Any additional adaptations will be reviewed with families and other professionals supporting the child.

Forms and Documentation

Initial Enrollment Paperwork

As we are preparing to welcome your child/ren and your family to OCC, we will assign you a set of paperwork to complete, including a Student and Family History and a Health History Form. These forms are very helpful as they provide teachers information regarding your child's development, your parenting values, and important background documentation including medical issues and allergies. Please take time to fill them out completely and to the best of your ability. During your child/ren's enrollment if there is additional information to add or information to correct, please let us know and we will help you to update the student's information.

Emergency Contact Information and Permission/Preferences Form

At the beginning of the school year, or when your child enrolls, you will complete an Emergency Contact Form and a Permission and Preferences Form. This is kept in the office so we can reach you, if necessary. We have copies in each classroom, on the playscape, and available for field trip excursions. Please make sure your emergency contact information is current at all times. Please notify us of changes in home, work, or cell phone numbers, physicians, and/or emergency contact individuals as soon as such changes occur.

Health Assessments

All children enrolled at OCC are required to have a Health Assessment (Child Health Report form) completed by their physician. This report must be submitted at enrollment and updated regularly. Children under 2 years old need an assessment every six months, and children ages 2 years and older need an assessment every twelve months. Immunization records (or "Refusal to Immunize" documentation) must also be on file.

Injury and Incident Reports

If your child has sustained an injury during the day, you will receive a brief Injury Report via Transparent Classroom detailing the nature of the injury, how it occurred, and which staff members were present. You will receive an email with a link to the report to electronically sign. We will keep these records on file.

In the case of any injury to the head or face, we also will call to notify parents/guardians as soon as possible following the injury so that there is not only written documentation, but a more timely notification to allow the family to assess the situation and make a decision about care.

Additionally, we also document behavioral incidents in a similar manner via Incident Reports, with the goal of trying to find patterns, antecedents, or ways to support improvement. These incident reports are to allow parents/guardians some initial awareness and oversight of behaviors observed at school. If a pattern emerges, frequency or severity increases, or if either staff or parents have a concern, Incident Reports provide initial data to start a conversation about how to better support the student involved.

Medication Form

If your child's doctor prescribes medication that must be administered during school hours, please give the medication to the office. All medications must be in their original containers and kept in a locked location within the school. A signed paper Medication Form must be completed including administration instructions, dosage, and frequency, to be kept with the medication.

A Topical Ointment Authorization Form must be completed via TC for any lotions, creams, or lip balms to be applied to your child. Never send any medicine in your child's backpack, even if they ride the Kindergarten bus. Cough drops, vitamins, lotions, and lip balm are all considered medicinal and may not be in the possession of children at school.

Transfer of Records

Requests for student records should be made in writing and addressed to the school's office. All requests must include the signature of an authorized parent or guardian, granting their permission for the release of records. The signed written release should include the child's name, birthdate, reason for the request, and address to which the documents should be sent.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition Payments

Your child's enrollment contract includes an annual tuition amount that is the full cost for the school year (mid-August inservice through mid-June inservice). If you choose a 10-payment plan, invoices will be emailed on the 1st of each month from August through May. If you choose a 2-payment plan, invoices will be emailed on the 1st of August and January. If you choose to pay your annual tuition in full, a single invoice will be emailed on August 1st. Payment is due by the 15th of the month. A 3% late fee will be incurred if not paid by the 20th of the month. If you are having financial difficulties and are unable to meet this obligation, please speak with the Head of School. All such information will be held in strictest confidence.

Our Children's Center's Tax ID # is 25-1815148 for tax or reimbursement purposes.

Registration Fees

School year and Summer registration fees are listed in the enrollment contracts. These fees help cover administrative costs associated with required record-keeping software.

Invoice Payment Methods

Your invoice payment method is initially chosen on your enrollment contract. If you ever need to change it, please contact the Office Administrator, who can make the necessary adjustments to your invoices.

Payments are accepted via check, bank bill-pay, or through the Quickbooks link on the statement. Physical checks or bank bill-pay is the preferred method of payment, and there is no fee for setting up this payment method. There is a 3% convenience fee for credit card payments and a 1% convenience fee ($12 max per payment) for ACH payments via Quickbooks. Personal check payments may be mailed directly to the school, or placed in the check deposit box located near the school offices. Please do not hand payment to any staff member or send in backpacks as it is not secure.

Returned Check Fees

For all checks returned to OCC for any reason, families' accounts will be charged the amount equivalent to those fees incurred by OCC.

Late Fees

A Late pick-up fee will be billed to families who arrive to pick up later than their contracted time. Time of care for 12:15, 3:15, and 4:15 dismissals ends when the parent/guardian has physical custody of their child. Time of care for 5:15 dismissal ends when the parent/guardian has physical custody of their child and has exited the building. Late pick-up fees after 12:15, 3:15, or 4:15 are $5 per minute. Late pick-up fees after 5:15 pm are $10 per minute.

Drop-In Fees

When available, one-time visits to additional programs are welcome. Availability is based

primarily on ratios and staffing. Please contact us at least 24 hours ahead of time for availability and confirmation/approval. Fees for "drop-in" programming are as follows:

	Primary	Infant/Toddler
Before School (7:45 - 8:45 a.m.)	$20	$25
After School 1 (3:15 pm - 4:15 pm)	$20	$25
After School 2 (3:15 pm - 5:15 pm)	$40	$50

Financial Aid

The OCC Financial Aid program is supported through the following primary sources: Annual fundraising of the OCC Board of Directors; designated proceeds raised through the OCC Pre-Kindergarten Fund (EITC); proceeds of the OCC Endowment fund, and other annual fundraising and grants specifically supporting financial aid at OCC. Eligibility for financial aid does not guarantee actual receipt. Applications for financial aid are available upon request. All such information will be held in strictest confidence.

Changes to Enrollment

Classroom Transitions

As with all areas of a Montessori education, we strive to follow the child through classroom transitions as well. Most often this transition is to an older age group when the child is ready. There will be times when age plays a part due to state ratio guidelines, however we offer much support to the child until the time of transition.

In knowledge of children that will most likely be ready for a classroom transition, we try to prepare them throughout the year. In the months leading up to a transition, children will often join their teacher in bringing items to the older rooms, normalizing the space for them. As the transition comes closer, the new teacher will spend some time in the current classroom observing and familiarizing themselves with the child. The child will then go to their new classroom for visits that will increase in length until the transition. The child's current teacher will join the child for some visits, depending on the child's comfort level and needs.

Families will be updated and communicated with throughout the process of a child being ready for a different space all the way to the transition to a new room. While there are more natural times of transition throughout the year (August, January, June), the goal will always be to transition a child when they are ready.

Schedule Changes

Any request for a change in your child's schedule must be submitted in written form and be approved by the Head of School. Every attempt will be made to accommodate parental requests within the limits of our program restraints. However, should it be determined that it is not in the best interest of the child or the school, requests may be denied. Modifications to programming often involve a tuition rate change.

Withdrawal (Parent Request)

If the withdrawal of a child is necessary for any reason, parents shall agree to provide OCC with two full month's written notice of such; otherwise, two months of tuition will be forfeited. Under special circumstances, and at the discretion of the Head of School, withdrawal requests due to a change in finances can be negotiated. If the date of a child's withdrawal is on or after March 1st, the remainder of the year's tuition is due.

Withdrawal (OCC Request)

Rarely, the Head of School, after much thought and discussion with a family and staff, may determine that OCC does not best suit the needs of a particular child, their family, and/or the school community. Parents will be given two weeks notice to find an alternative school. The Head of School will assist parents, as best they can, in finding a more suitable location for their child and/or refer the family to other agencies for assistance.

OCC actively works to avoid these situations by:

- Creating a positive climate that focuses on prevention

- Developing clear, appropriate and consistent expectations and consequences that address the disruptive behaviors.
- Collaborating with Early Intervention, Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant, Behavioral Health and other services.
- Family engagement- establishing positive relationships with families that are responsive both culturally and linguistically. Involving families in regular communication, meetings, and planning sessions that work to collaborate with the school.

Statement on Discipline

Our Children's Center has a strong commitment to implementing discipline of students in a respectful, firm, and encouraging manner. It is our long-term goal to help children learn to be self-disciplined rather than merely monitored by adults.

The OCC Staff manual states that "No corporal punishment is ever to be implemented at school" (e.g., hitting, spanking, pushing, etc.) In addition, no psychological or humiliating punishment is ever to be implemented at school (e.g., denial of snack or lunch, threats of physical punishment, name-calling, intimidation, etc).

The establishment of clear limits and consistency in maintaining these limits goes a long way toward preventing problems from occurring and toward supporting the child's development of self-discipline. This is an important area for alignment between home and school.

Guidelines for Positive Discipline

Our role as educators is to help children develop to their fullest potential and to recognize the many facets of child development. It is important that our discipline policy focuses on guidance, redirection and praise rather than punishment or negative reinforcement. We strive to help children learn self-control, while at the same time developing positive self-esteem. Discipline must be age appropriate and stated in language that children understand. It is important to have support from families in order to build good character in children.

- We set realistic expectations for children's behavior.
- We provide an environment that will increase the probability children will succeed.
- We give children choices and alternatives to turn destructive situations into constructive situations.
- We validate what the children say and feel; if appropriate.
- We use natural and logical consequences and empower the children to be responsible for their own behavior.
- We teach children to use problem solving skills and strategies to resolve conflicts.
- We work out behavior plans with the family when needed.

Positive Behavior Management Plan

Children who present behavior challenges are discussed in teaching team meetings, staff meetings, with the Level Coordinators (Infant/Toddler or Primary), and with the Head of School. Appropriate remedial strategies are based on systematic observation of the child and communication among staff and with parents.

Short-term solutions in the classroom may include the child staying near a teacher, removing themselves to a quiet place in the room to calm their bodies and consider more appropriate behavior options, a short break from the classroom to sit or walk around, or handing supervision to another staff member for a brief period of time. Modified schedules (to shorten the day, adjust extended care, etc) is another mitigation strategy that is considered for the short (or longer) term.

Winter/Inclement Weather Closings

We follow the State College Area School District's decision when deciding to delay, cancel, or dismiss early due to weather. We will send out our own announcement as soon as possible, but you can also choose to follow local news sources or SCASD notifications for the most timely information.

School Cancellation

If SCASD is closed, OCC will also close for the day.

Delayed Opening

When SCASD calls for a two-hour delay due to inclement weather, OCC will open at 9:00am for the Before School Program and 9:45am for the main school day. The Kindergarten buses will still follow SCASD's two-hour delay. Please notify OCC by 9:00am whether you will be driving your kindergartener to school or if they will be riding the bus.

Delay/Closure - Low Temperatures

OCC Montessori follows all delay and closure decisions of the State College Area School District (SCASD), ***except*** when delays or closures are based solely on low temperature or wind chill. In those cases, OCC will generally remain open unless wind chill reaches -25°F or lower, outdoor temperatures at or below -10°F impact building heating performance, indoor temperatures cannot be maintained at a minimum of 65°F in accordance with 55 Pa. Code § 3800.89, or site conditions (such as ice) are unsafe. As general guidance, OCC will operate normally above -15°F wind chill, evaluate conditions between -15°F and -25°F, and consider delay or closure at or below -25°F. The Head of School retains discretion to make all final decisions based on safety and facility conditions, and families will be notified through standard communication channels.

Early Dismissal

Should SCASD dismiss early, OCC families will be notified as to our closing time. The safety of our families and staff is our primary goal in making these decisions.

Emergency Plan

In the event of an emergency situation at the school, the school's response is defined in our Emergency Plan. Depending upon the circumstances of the emergency, we will use one of the following protective actions:

Modified Operations: This may include cancellation/postponement of normal activities due to such things as weather or utility disruptions.

In Place Sheltering: Sudden occurrences- weather, hazardous materials or intruder related- may dictate that taking cover inside the classrooms or another building location is the best immediate response.

Immediate Evacuation: Students will be evacuated via the "Fire Drill Routes" to a designated area away from the building. Once declared "All Clear," we will return to our classrooms. Should the situation require a complete evacuation of the facility, children will be taken to the facility St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 208 W Foster Avenue, State College, PA 16801.

All of the above situations require the staff to follow specific instructions and procedures, including securing the emergency information binders. In an emergency, staff and resources will be focused on providing for the safety and wellbeing of children and staff. Once the situation has been resolved, parents will be contacted via phone and/or email as to the status and procedures for the safe release of their children.

Family Handbook Acknowledgement of Receipt and Review

The Pennsylvania State Department of Education and The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services requires that all parents be made aware of the policies and procedures applicable to enrollment in our program. Please read the OCC Family Handbook in its entirety. Once completed, please acknowledge your receipt and understanding of the information included by signing the appropriate form in Transparent Classroom.

PLEASE NOTE: Changes from the 2025-2026 Family Handbook that are new or different in this year's document are highlighted in yellow or redacted. Although the expectation is that you will read the document in full (it has many important reminders), please pay careful attention to the highlighted sections. These may reflect shifts in policy or expectations from the previous year for returning families.

Family Handbook located at:

Website
https://occmontessori.org/current-families/

Transparent Classroom
School Info Tab
https://www.transparentclassroom.com/s/1247/dashboard?locale=en

OCC App
Within your phone app, or at
https://1spot.app/?app=-OAN8pqWJ8h7jGzOZBrM