



CREATIVE LEARNING INSTITUTE

EST. 2025

FAMILY HANDBOOK

Creative Learning Institute – Family Handbook

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SECTION 1: WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Dear Families,

Welcome to the Creative Learning Institute! It is with great excitement and gratitude that we open our doors to your family. We are honored to partner with you on your child's educational journey.

At CLI, we believe that every child is uniquely gifted and capable of thriving in an environment that honors their individuality. Our microschool was designed to meet the needs of homeschooling families who seek a flexible, engaging, and supportive learning community — one that combines the personalization of homeschooling with the structure and connection of a small school setting.

Through project-based learning, hands-on experiences, enrichment opportunities, and a nurturing peer environment, we aim to inspire curiosity, build confidence, and cultivate a love for learning.

This handbook will serve as a guide to help you understand how our program works, what to expect, and how we can work together to support the success of your child. We are committed to transparency, communication, and community — and we are so glad you're here.

In partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "LaJeaune" in a cursive script, with "S. CUTINO" in a smaller, sans-serif font underneath.

LaJeaune Cutino,
Director & Founder
Creative Learning Institute

1.2 Vision & Mission

Our Vision

To cultivate a nurturing and dynamic learning environment where each child's unique gifts are recognized, encouraged, and developed. We blend the personalized attention of homeschooling with the structure and community of a small school, empowering students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally at their own pace. Our microschool emphasizes project-based learning, encouraging students to think critically, be expressive, and engage deeply with the world around them.

Our Mission

To provide a safe, flexible, and enriching educational environment where K-12 students can explore, create, and grow through project-based learning experiences.

1.3 Core Values

- Creativity – We foster imagination and encourage innovative thinking.
- Community – We believe in the power of connection, collaboration, and shared responsibility.
- Curiosity – We inspire students to ask questions, explore new ideas, and love learning.
- Compassion – We treat each other with kindness, respect, and empathy.
- Courage – We support students in stepping outside their comfort zones and trying new things.

1.4 Statement of Purpose

What is Creative Learning Institute?

CLI is a nonprofit, part-time micro-school designed to enrich the educational experience of homeschooled students in Southwest Charlotte. We offer two core instructional days each week (Monday and Friday) with additional enrichment opportunities throughout the month. Our learning environment is project-based, student-centered, and deeply rooted in family and community engagement. We aim to be a bridge between the flexibility of homeschooling and the structure of collaborative learning.

SECTION 2: SCHOOL OVERVIEW

2.1 Program Description

The Creative Learning Institute is a part-time microschool designed to supplement homeschooling through a structured, project-based learning environment. Students meet on Mondays and Fridays from 9:00 AM to 3:15 PM at our host location, a welcoming and family-oriented church facility in Southwest Charlotte.

Our program supports grades K–12 and emphasizes small class sizes, hands-on projects, community-building, and enrichment. We are not a full-time private school or a homeschool replacement — rather, we exist to enrich and elevate the homeschool experience.

2.2 Typical Week & Enrichment Overview

Core Instructional Days:

- Mondays and Fridays
- 9:00 AM – 3:15 PM
- Students will engage in core academic units through project-based activities, group work, discussion, and exploration.

Enrichment Days:

- Offered on select Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays depending on the schedule and age group
- May include topics such as: STEM clubs, arts, cooking, service learning, leadership, personal finance, etc.
- Some enrichment days may require a separate signup and/or small supply fee

2.3 Calendar & Key Dates

Families will receive a full school calendar upon enrollment. The school year generally runs from September to June, with closures for major holidays, weather emergencies, and planned breaks.

A list of important dates — including field trips, family events, and enrichment days — will be distributed before the school year begins and updated as needed.

2.4 Location & Facilities

Creative Learning Institute operates out of a local church in Southwest Charlotte. The facility includes:

- 5–6 dedicated classrooms
- A common café area for lunch and informal gathering*
- Outdoor space for recreation and movement
- Secure entry and exit points for student safety
-

*While students may dine in the café, lunches must be brought from home, as no food service is provided.

2.5 Communication with Families

We believe in open and proactive communication. Parents can expect regular updates through:

- Email and/or parent app (TBD)
- Weekly newsletters
- Event reminders and enrichment day announcements

Questions, concerns, or feedback can be directed to the Director or Assistant Director during school hours or via email.

SECTION 3: ENROLLMENT & ADMISSIONS

3.1 Eligibility

The Creative Learning Institute serves students in grades K–12 who are currently being homeschooled or planning to homeschool. Families must be in compliance with North Carolina’s homeschool laws, including maintaining a registered homeschool with the state.

Our micro-school is open to all families regardless of race, religion, family background, or educational philosophy, provided they align with our mission, values, and learning approach.

3.2 Enrollment Process

Enrollment is open on a rolling basis until capacity is reached. To enroll, families must:

- Complete the Enrollment Application
- Attend an optional parent info session or phone consultation
- Submit a non-refundable deposit to secure a student’s spot
- Provide all required forms, including student health/emergency info
- Sign the Family Agreement (including acknowledgment of this handbook)

Once enrolled, families will receive a welcome packet and school calendar.

3.3 Tuition & Payment Policies

Tuition Overview

- Monthly Tuition: – see enrollment form
- \$300 deposit required upon enrollment
- Sibling discounts available (50% off 2nd child, 75% off 3rd +)
- Tuition covers staff compensation, curriculum access, classroom materials, and program operations

Payment Schedule:

- Tuition is billed weekly, with biweekly and monthly payment options available if paying in advance.
- Payments are due on Monday of each week.

Late Payments:

- A \$25 late fee may be applied to any unpaid tuition after a 5-day grace period
- Accounts more than 30 days overdue may result in suspension from the program until brought current

3.4 Refunds & Withdrawals

The \$300 deposit is non-refundable and secures your child's place in the program.

Partial tuition refunds may be granted in emergency withdrawal situations within 30-days of enrollment. No refunds will be issued for student absences, illness, or behavior-related suspensions.

3.5 Class Size & Waitlist Policy

CLI maintains small class sizes (10–12 students) to support personalized learning. Once classes are full:

- Families may join a waitlist
- Priority may be given to siblings of enrolled students and early applicants

Families on the waitlist will be notified if space becomes available.

SECTION 4: ACADEMIC PROGRAM

4.1 Curriculum Philosophy

The Creative Learning Institute uses a hybrid academic model that blends traditional homeschooling with project-based, hands-on learning in a supportive community environment.

We believe students learn best when they are actively engaged, encouraged to ask questions, and given opportunities to create, collaborate, and think critically. Our curriculum encourages exploration across subjects and integrates life skills, problem-solving, and creativity.

4.2 Curriculum & Tools

Our core academic content is supported by:

- Power Homeschool, an online curriculum platform providing core instruction in math, language arts, science, and social studies
- Project-Based Learning (PBL) modules, created by CLI, that allow students to apply what they're learning through real-world challenges and creative projects
- Supplemental resources and activities led by teachers in each classroom to enhance and personalize the learning experience

4.3 Grading & Assessment

CLI does not issue traditional grades or report cards. Instead, we focus on:

- Student portfolios
- Project presentations
- Progress feedback from instructors

Parents remain the primary educational record-keepers and are responsible for maintaining official transcripts and records for their homeschool. Our teachers will provide support, feedback, and documentation of student participation and growth when needed. If parents wish to utilize the grades provided in Power Homeschool, they are welcome to do so.

4.4 Enrichment Opportunities

In addition to our core instructional days (Mondays & Fridays), students have the opportunity to participate in:

- Enrichment days (STEM, art, life skills, nature, music, etc.)
- Clubs (e.g., leadership, science, entrepreneurship — based on interest and staff availability)
- Hands-on workshops
- Field trips throughout the school year

Enrichment activities may take place on various Tuesdays, Wednesdays, or Thursdays and will be announced in advance. Some may require additional signup or a small activity fee.

4.5 Homework Policy

CLI does not assign mandatory homework. All academic content is delivered during school hours. However, parents may be encouraged to:

- Support their child's ongoing learning at home
- Review concepts introduced during micro-school days
- Continue working through their Power Homeschool courses independently

4.6 Presentation Days

At CLI, we believe students should have opportunities to share what they've learned, showcase their work, and celebrate their growth.

Throughout the year, students will participate in Presentation Days — informal, age-appropriate opportunities to present projects, experiments, artwork, or creative writing in front of peers and family members.

These events help build:

- Public speaking and communication skills
- Confidence and ownership of learning
- A sense of pride and accomplishment

Presentation Days are low-pressure and deeply affirming — students are encouraged, never forced, to participate at their comfort level.

4.7 Cross-Grade Collaboration

As a K–12 community, we embrace the strength of multi-age learning.

Our school structure encourages cross-grade collaboration through:

- Mixed-age project groups
- Peer mentoring (older students supporting younger ones)
- Whole-school enrichment activities
- Community service projects

These experiences foster leadership, empathy, teamwork, and a sense of belonging across the grade levels.

4.8 Project-Based Learning

Project-Based Learning (PBL) is at the heart of our academic approach at CLI. Rather than learning through worksheets and lectures alone, students engage in hands-on, meaningful projects that connect academic subjects to real-life experiences.

Projects are designed to:

- Encourage critical thinking and problem-solving
- Foster collaboration, research, and creativity
- Support deep understanding of academic content
- Give students the opportunity to express their learning in a variety of formats (presentations, models, writing, art, etc.)

Projects may be individual or group-based and often span multiple weeks. They integrate subjects like science, social studies, math, and language arts in dynamic ways. Each project ends with a reflection or presentation component, helping students build communication skills and take ownership of their learning.

SECTION 5: STUDENT EXPECTATIONS & CODE OF CONDUCT

5.1 Community Agreements

At Creative Learning Institute, we are more than a school — we are a learning community. Every student is expected to contribute to a respectful, kind, and productive environment. We follow a simple set of community values:

- Be Kind – Treat others with respect, patience, and empathy.
- Be Safe – Keep yourself and others physically and emotionally safe.
- Be Responsible – Follow directions, take care of materials, and own your actions.
- Be Curious – Ask questions, try new things, and support your classmates' growth.
- Be a Team Player – Collaborate, include others, and communicate thoughtfully.

5.2 Behavior Expectations

All students are expected to:

- Arrive on time and ready to learn
- Listen to instructions and participate respectfully
- Keep hands, feet, and personal items to themselves
- Use appropriate language and tone
- Treat the facility, materials, and each other with care
- Resolve conflicts peacefully or with help from a teacher

CLI has a zero-tolerance policy for:

- Bullying or harassment (verbal, physical, or cyber)
- Physical aggression or violence
- Repeated defiance or disruption that hinders learning
- Possession of dangerous or inappropriate items

5.3 Disciplinary Process

We approach discipline as an opportunity for learning, not punishment. When behavioral concerns arise, we follow these steps:

1. Verbal reminder and redirection
2. Cool-down time or removal from activity (as needed)
3. Conference with student and written incident report
4. Parent notification and discussion
5. Behavior plan or temporary suspension if behavior continues

Serious infractions may result in immediate suspension or expulsion at the discretion of the Director.

5.4 Technology & Device Policy

All students are required to bring a personal electronic device (such as a tablet, Chromebook, or laptop) to use during instructional hours. These devices will be used primarily to access their Power Homeschool courses and complete academic work.

- Students must come with their device fully charged and ready for use.
- Devices are to be used only for academic purposes during the school day unless otherwise permitted by a staff member.
- The use of headphones or earbuds will be allowed during independent work.

Phone Policy:

- Cell phones must remain on vibrate and put away during instruction unless being used for research or school-approved academic purposes.
- Excessive or non-academic use of phones may result in a warning or temporary removal of phone privileges during school hours.

Note: CLI is not responsible for lost, damaged, or stolen electronics. Please ensure devices are labeled and stored with care.

5.5 Dress Code Guidelines

Students should come to school dressed in comfortable, modest, and weather-appropriate clothing that allows them to move, explore, and participate in active learning.

Please avoid:

- Clothing with offensive or inappropriate graphics/text
- Excessively short skirts or shorts
- Crop tops or shirts with open sides

Closed-toe shoes are strongly recommended for safety during movement-based activities and outdoor play.

SECTION 6: HEALTH & SAFETY

6.1 Wellness & Illness Policy

To protect the health of all students and staff, families must keep students home if they exhibit any of the following:

- Fever of 100.4°F or higher
- Vomiting or diarrhea within the last 24 hours
- Persistent cough or sore throat
- Contagious illnesses (e.g., flu, COVID-19, pink eye, lice)

Students must be symptom-free for 24 hours without medication before returning. If a child becomes ill during the day, parents will be contacted for immediate pick-up.

6.2 Medication Policy

If a student requires medication during the school day, families must:

- Send medication each day in a dedicated medication bag
- Hand the bag to CLI administration at morning drop-off
- Ensure the bag is labeled and contains only what is needed for that day

Staff will not store or keep medication beyond the school day.

All medication administration will be documented in a Medication Log, and a copy will be sent home to parents on the same day.

6.3 Emergencies & Accidents

In the case of a medical emergency:

- First aid will be administered by trained staff
- Parents/guardians will be notified immediately
- Emergency services (911) will be contacted if needed

All families must complete an Emergency Contact Form before the start of the school year and keep it updated.

6.4 Arrival & Dismissal Procedures

- Arrival Window: 8:45 AM – 9:00 AM
- Dismissal Window: 3:15 PM – 3:30 PM

A parent or authorized adult must sign the student in and out each day. Students will only be released to individuals listed on the Authorized Pickup List, and photo ID may be requested.

6.5 Food & Lunch Policy

All students must bring a nut-free packed lunch and reusable water bottle each day. While students will eat in the church café, no meals will be provided.

A microwave is available for students who bring warm lunches. We encourage sending meals that are easy to heat and manage independently.

Please avoid sending soda, energy drinks, or candy

6.6 Outdoor Play & Movement

Students will enjoy regular outdoor time for recreation and movement-based activities (weather permitting). Families should send students dressed for the weather and in closed-toe shoes appropriate for play. Please label jackets and water bottles.

School Safety Policy:

School Safety at Creative Learning Institute

At Creative Learning Institute, the safety and well-being of every student is our highest priority. We are committed to creating a secure, supportive, and nurturing environment where students can learn, grow, and thrive with peace of mind.

Here's how we prioritize safety on campus:

-Secure Access

All entrance doors to the facility remain locked during program hours. Access is limited to enrolled families and authorized personnel only.

-Check-In Protocol

All visitors must check in with the Director or Assistant Director before entering beyond the main entrance. This ensures we maintain a safe and supervised environment at all times.

- No Bullying Policy

We maintain a zero-tolerance policy for bullying or harassment of any kind. Our small class sizes and strong community culture support positive peer interactions and emotional well-being.

-Medical Preparedness

Our Director is a Registered Nurse with 5+ years of clinical experience and holds current Basic Life Support (BLS) and Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) CPR certifications. First aid supplies are available on site at all times, and medical protocols are in place to handle minor injuries and urgent health concerns.

-A Safe Place to Learn

With secure access, caring staff, and clear expectations, Creative Learning Institute is more than a microschool — it's a community where your child is seen, known, and safe.

SECTION 7: FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

7.1 Partnership Philosophy

At Creative Learning Institute, we believe that parents are the first and most important educators in a child's life. As a microschool built to support homeschooling families, we aim to function as a trusted partner and extension of your child's learning journey.

We value open communication, mutual respect, and a team-based approach that places student growth at the center of all we do.

7.2 Communication

We are committed to transparent and timely communication with families. Expect regular updates through:

- Email or Parent Communication App (Brightwheel)
- Weekly or biweekly newsletters
- Field trip and enrichment sign-ups
- Personal check-ins as needed

Families should feel welcome to reach out with questions, concerns, or feedback. Communication should be respectful and directed first to the school Director/Assistant Director when appropriate.

7.3 Family Participation

While not required, unless otherwise agreed upon per contract, families are strongly encouraged to participate in:

- Enrichment Days (as guest speakers, volunteers, or assistants)
- Special events and presentation days
- Field trips
- Parent-led clubs or interest groups
- Donation drives or classroom supply support

Your time, talents, and involvement make a meaningful impact and help cultivate a close-knit community.

7.4 Family Events

CLI will host occasional family engagement events, which may include:

- Student project showcases
- Holiday or seasonal celebrations
- Parent education nights or resource meetups
- Service learning days

These events strengthen community, celebrate student growth, and connect families with shared values.

7.5 Conflict Resolution

We understand that questions, misunderstandings, or concerns may arise. When they do, we ask that families follow these steps to support respectful and productive communication:

1. Bring concerns directly to the Director or Assistant Director. They will work with you to understand the situation and determine next steps.
2. Approach all conversations with a spirit of partnership and mutual respect.
3. Be open to feedback, clarity, and collaborative solutions that prioritize student well-being and classroom harmony.

We value open dialogue and are committed to resolving issues quickly, thoughtfully, and in alignment with our shared values.

7.6 Parent Code of Conduct

To maintain a positive, respectful, and safe environment for students, staff, and families, all CLI parents and guardians are expected to:

- Communicate respectfully with staff, other families, and students at all times
- Address questions or concerns directly and privately with the Director or Assistant Director — not publicly or via social media
- Support school policies, routines, and expectations
- Ensure students arrive on time and are picked up promptly
- Supervise children who are not enrolled (e.g., siblings during events)
- Uphold the values of CLI, including kindness, inclusion, and community-building
- Refrain from gossip, divisive behavior, or confrontational conduct on school grounds
- Use appropriate language and behavior at all times while on campus or representing CLI

Failure to follow the Parent Code of Conduct may result in a meeting with leadership and, in serious cases, suspension or removal from the program.

SECTION 8: SCHOOL POLICIES

8.1 Attendance & Participation

Because CLI operates on a part-time model, consistent attendance is essential to maintain continuity in student learning and community-building.

- Students are expected to attend all scheduled Mondays and Fridays unless ill or excused in advance
- Families should notify the Director as soon as possible regarding any absences
- Excessive absences may impact a student's ability to complete projects or participate in enrichment

8.2 Weather Closures & Emergency Cancellations

CLI generally follows Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools for weather-related closures, but final decisions will be made by the Director based on site-specific conditions.

Families will be notified by email and/or text as early as possible if school is delayed, canceled, or closed due to:

- Severe weather
- Power or facility issues
- Safety-related concerns

Make-up enrichment days or online learning options may be offered at the discretion of the Director.

8.3 Uniform Policy – Special Occasions & Events

While Creative Learning Institute does not require daily uniforms, we believe that coordinated attire fosters a sense of unity, school pride, and professionalism during special events.

Uniforms will be required for:

- School-wide presentations and performances
- Field trips and off-site learning events (as designated)
- Special assemblies or ceremonies
- Any other event specified by administration

Uniform Guidelines:

- Tops: Approved CLI uniform shirts (various styles and colors will be available for purchase)
- Bottoms: Khaki pants, skirts, or shorts (length appropriate)
- Shoes: Closed-toe tennis shoes or sneakers (comfortable for walking and activities)

Notes:

- Families will receive advance notice of all events requiring uniforms.
- Uniform items should be clean, well-fitting, and free from tears or excessive wear.
- Non-uniform jackets and sweaters may be worn for warmth, but uniform shirts should remain visible during events.

8.4 Supplies & Materials

A detailed student supply list will be provided upon enrollment. These materials are needed to support daily classroom activities.

In general, families are expected to provide:

- Personal school supplies (notebooks, pencils, etc.)
- A backpack and lunchbox
- A fully charged learning device (tablet, laptop, etc.)
- Headphones or earbuds

Tuition covers basic shared materials and project supplies. Families may be asked to contribute additional items or donations throughout the year.

8.5 Forms & Records

Prior to enrollment, families must submit all required documentation, including:

- Enrollment form and deposit
- Emergency contact form
- Medication/health info (if applicable)
- Parent agreement form

All records are confidential and stored securely. It is the parent's responsibility to update forms as needed during the year.

8.6 Policy Acknowledgment

Families will be asked to sign a Family Handbook Acknowledgment Form at the time of enrollment.

This confirms that you have read, understood, and agreed to the expectations, policies, and procedures outlined in this handbook.