

Preschool Parent Handbook 2023 - 2024



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This handbook outlines the policies for the St. Thomas More Catholic Preschool program. Policy titles are in bold type and underlined. Policies are subject to changes to meet State of Colorado Rules and Regulations, Archdiocese of Denver Schools guidelines, St. Thomas More Catholic Parish School policies and the needs of our students and program. Parent will be notified of such changes should they occur.

Purpose and Philosophy

St. Thomas More is a Christ-centered, sacramental and stewardship community within the Archdiocese of Denver and the Universal Roman Catholic Church. Our Mission is, as Christ has commanded, to “Go and make disciples” (Mt. 28:19) and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit to build the Kingdom of God!

The STM Catholic Preschool consists of five classrooms:

- One 2 ½ year old classroom (cannot attend until child is 2 ½)
- Two 3-year-old classrooms (3 by October 1)
- Two 4-year-old classrooms (4 by October 1)
- One Junior Kindergarten classroom (Turning 5 by December 31)

The program is open to children of St. Thomas More parishioners and those in the surrounding community. Children with special needs will be considered and evaluated on an individual basis and the program’s capacity to meet their individual needs. STM Preschool operates in accordance with the Archdiocese of Denver non-discrimination policy.

Children are natural learners seeking to understand the world they live in. Play is true learning time for young children. They are sensory learners, and therefore, need plenty of time to see, touch, taste, smell, and hear everything around them. The parent is the first and primary educator of the child. The goal of the program is to assist the parent by providing a Catholic environment with developmentally age-appropriate curriculum encompassing physical, cognitive, and language skills as well as self-expression in the social, emotional, academic and spiritual domains. Positive instruction is utilized at all times to foster a nurturing relationship between child, staff and families. The Archdiocese of Denver and the Rules and Regulations set by the Division of Child Care, Colorado Department of Human Services provide guidelines for curriculum development.

The preschool (children two and half years old and older) curriculum includes areas of art, blocks and accessories (pre-math/math), books and posters (literacy/language arts), dramatic play area (social studies), large muscle equipment (health/safety/physical education), manipulative toys (literacy/language arts, mathematics, and fine motor), musical equipment, and science materials. At St. Thomas More, Catholic faith and prayer are also included with the use of an Atrium based on Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

Program Sessions

Classroom placement is determined by the child’s age per guidelines stated above.

Children 2 1/2 years old by August

Preschool Session A
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday
8 AM to 1 PM

Children 3 years old thru 5 years old by October 1, 2023

Preschool Session A
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday
8:00 AM to 1 PM

Preschool Session B
Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday
8 AM to 3 PM
Preschool Session C
Monday-Friday
8AM-3PM

Class ratios are as follows:

2 ½ year olds	1 adult to 8 children maximum group size of 16
3-year-olds	1 adult to 10 children (or better) maximum group size 20
4-year-olds & JK	1 adult to 12 children (or better) maximum group size 24

Enrollment and Withdrawal

Enrollment will occur on a yearly basis. Children are enrolled for the year with the school year following the Elementary School calendar. Yearly calendars will be distributed with final registration materials. Due to class size and ratios, we do not have make-up days for illness, vacations or non-school days.

Early registration is in January for families currently enrolled in the program. Open enrollment for new families is held in early February for the school year beginning in August. An application form accompanied by a non-refundable fee of \$100 is required to begin the enrollment process. Registration forms are numbered upon receipt. Registration processing is prioritized as follows:

1. Families with children currently enrolled in either our program or the STM Parish School will have placement priority until open enrollment begins, usually the first week in February.
2. First come, first served as applications are received.

Families will be notified as to their status of acceptance into the program. Once classes are full, names will be placed on wait lists.

Upon enrollment, each student must complete an immunization form and health form dated after May 1st and returned by August 1. As mandated by the State, forms must be completed, signed or stamped by a physician or RN and dated. Computer printouts without proper signatures or stamps may not be accepted. It is best to have your child's medical practice use the forms issued by CDHS. You should have received these forms in your child's acceptance packet.

A written statement of withdrawal needs to be submitted to the director at least 30 days prior to departure date. A parent may be asked to meet with the Director and teaching staff to create a behavior plan in the event that a concerning behavior has been observed and addressed with the child on several separate occasions. We reserve the right to request a parent withdraw their child due to the school's inability to meet the child's needs, behavior concerns or late tuition payments. Tuition refunds are prorated based on notification date.

Tuition

Tuition is payable in monthly, semester, or yearly amounts as stated on the tuition contract. Tuition will be paid through the FACTS application. FACTS is the third-party management system that STM Catholic uses for fees and tuition management. All families enrolled at STM Catholic must create an account and pay tuition through facts. **This is a mandatory requirement for all families.** Even if you are paying tuition in one payment, you must do so via FACTS. If you are requesting tuition assistance, you may do so via FACTS as they are responsible for assessing those needs.

<u>2021/2022 Tuition & Fees:</u>	<u>Per year</u>
Registration Fee (per child)	\$ 100
Regular Tuition	
Half Day (8am-1pm) 3 days	\$4,435
Full Day (8am-3pm) 3 day	\$5,840
Full Day (8am-3pm)	\$8,100
Home and school fee (per family/year)	\$ 50

Parking

STM Catholic Preschool parking is in the north lot next to the Youth Center. Please follow the **counterclockwise arrows painted on the parking lot**. Children need to be walked to their class by an **adult** (18 years or older) using the main Preschool Entrance located in St. Francis Hall next to the playground behind the Church. Please make sure you sign in your child with your teacher. Use caution when backing up and driving through the parking lot. Please be patient as families enter and exit the parking lot. **Do not leave children unattended in cars.**

Teacher Contact

Your child's teacher will use school gmail to communicate with you and a classroom newsletter on our Google Sites. **Preschoolers are expected to be potty-trained.** If your child has a security blanket or "lovey", please pack it in his/her backpack during the first two weeks of school only if your child is half day– just in case! If your child is full day, they may bring a blankie and use it during nap.

Meet & Greet/Orientation

This offers a time for parents and children to meet their teachers in a classroom setting. Parents will receive an invitation with their assigned time to visit the classroom for an hour before school starts. Assigned times are 9:00am -10:00am or 10:30am-11:30am. During this time, children have the opportunity to become familiar with their classroom, some of their classmates, as well as their teachers. Teachers will outline class expectations and discuss curriculum goals at this time. After the hour, parents and children will leave and return on the first day of school.

Parent Meeting

Parents are asked to attend a meeting with the director at 8:15 AM the first day of school. The director will hold a question and answer. Please be sure you stop by and get all of your questions answered.

Snow Days/Emergency Closures

If St. Thomas More Catholic School or St. Thomas More Center is closed, Preschool will also be closed.

We follow Douglas County Schools or Cherry Creek Schools for school closures. School closures are announced on radio station KOA AM 850 and local TV stations 4, 7, and 9. The announcements of school closures are usually on the evening news at 10:00 P.M. and morning news at 6:00 A.M. and 7:00 A.M. You will also receive a text or email from the school office. Parents may also call the church weather line at 303-468-0555. If the school (K-8) is having a 9:00am late start then we will also have a late start. STM Preschool will leave it up to the discretion of the parents whether or not they wish to bring their child to preschool. We request that parents contact the preschool office if they choose not to bring their child to school so that we will know not to expect them. Safety first!

Arrival and Dismissal

Children are to be escorted into the building by an adult and signed in at their classroom door. Students who arrive late must follow the same procedure. If the class is away from the room at the time of late

arrival, students must be brought to the preschool office where they will be escorted by office staff to be reunited with their class. Roll calls and head counts will be done every hour and at all transitions based on sign-in sheets, to verify where children are at all times. The Director will make periodic head counts throughout the day. Classrooms will be equipped with a radio which will travel with the class when outside the classroom.

Only adults with prior written or verbal authorization will be allowed to sign children out. Proof of identification will be requested. Children not picked up within 10 minutes of the end of the session will be brought to the office. At this time, a \$1 charge per minute will be assessed. Payment is due immediately.

If parents cannot be reached, emergency numbers as listed on the up-date form will be called. If an adult cannot be reached within one hour after the close of the session, the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office may also be contacted.

Should a student be unaccounted for during the session, a thorough search of the school grounds, inside and outside, will be conducted. If a child is not located within 15 minutes, parents will be notified along with the Sheriff's Department.

The director will verify that all children are picked up at the end of the day by reviewing the attendance sheet and inspecting the classroom. Telephone calls may be made to verify sign-out.

Preschool sessions begin at 8:00 a.m. Children should be picked up promptly at 1:00 p.m. or 3:00 p.m.

Progress Assessments and Conferences

Individual conferences may be arranged with the teacher and/or director upon request at any time.

Progress assessment is continuous. Classroom notes are sent home throughout the year. Assessments for all classes will go home in late fall and late spring.

Parent-Teacher conferences for all classes will be held in October to discuss any concerns, goals and to get to know the child late February for progress reports – outside of class time. Sign-up Genius will be available when classes resume after the Christmas break. We request that children not be present for the conference for we only have a limited amount of time.

Snacks

For the safety and to prevent allergic reactions we ask the parents supply one snack for half day children and two snacks for full day children. Please store them in your child's cubby.

Birthdays will be celebrated in the classroom with a birthday crown and singing. Parents may bring a special treat/snack for each classmate **which will be sent home to be given at the parent's discretion.** Parents need to discuss the birthday treat/snack with the classroom teachers a minimum of 2 weeks prior to the date it will be brought to school for distribution. All snacks/treats must be individually packaged in order to be easily distributed at the end of the school day. A nutritious birthday snack is encouraged – or, better yet, a party favor bag for all classmates.

Snack variance forms will be created by the classroom teachers any time the class will be eating anything other than what the parents provide. When possible, the variance sheet will include a list of ingredients in the alternate snack. Snack variance forms must be signed by each parent, either granting or denying the teachers permission to offer the alternate snack to your child. Children who do not have signed permission to be offered the alternate snack will be offered the snack that the parent supplied in the child's cubbie.

Lunch

Each child will be expected to bring a lunch prepared at home to school each day. Lunches should contain nutritious foods with serving sizes appropriate to your child's age and size. Ice packs should be included in lunch boxes when there are foods requiring refrigeration. We are unable to store student lunches in a refrigerator.

Good hygiene is practiced at snack/lunch time. Children and adults wash hands, tables are washed and sanitized, and adults use disposable gloves during food handling. A prayer is said before eating. Children participate in clean up, disposing of cups, napkins and cleaning up spills to encourage independence.

Rest Time

Colorado Department of Early Learning requires a rest period of at least 30 minutes for all children remaining in the preschool for longer than 5 hours. In addition, room lights must be dim during rest time to promote an atmosphere conducive to sleep. Children will not be forced to sleep. Quiet activities such as puzzles or books are acceptable for children who do not sleep after the 30 minutes. Children will be allowed to leave their napping area within 10 minutes of waking.

Illnesses, Accidents, Injuries and Emergencies

If a child is not well enough to participate in all daily activities, he/she should not be at school. Children should be free of fever, diarrhea, and vomiting for **24 hours before attending school without the aid of medication**. Children with green runny noses are considered contagious and should not be at school. A child is not considered fever-free when given a pain/fever reducer. Child must be fever-free for 24 hours without pain/fever reducer. Please inform the office of any contagious diseases such as strep throat, chicken pox, or pink eye, so notice may be posted.

Children, who are taking antibiotics, must be on them for **48 hours before returning to school**. Cold medication will not be given during school hours. This includes the use of cough drops. If your child cannot attend school without medication, please keep him/her home.

Medication

Children requiring medication due to health conditions (i.e. allergy reaction, asthma inhalers) need to have a physician health care action plan statement on file with the office. Children requiring medication as preventative measures (i.e. diaper ointment) need to have a parent health plan statement on file with the office. Medications will be stored in a locked cabinet and dispensed only by persons previously trained. This procedure for storing and administering children's medicines and delegation of medication administration is in compliance with Section 12-38-132, C.R.S., of the "Nurse Practice Act". All emergency medications will be kept unlocked and brought with child wherever he/she goes on the school grounds. Please discuss this with the director.

Should a child become ill at school, he/she will be separated from the other children and parents will be called. Should a parent not be reached within 15 minutes, the emergency numbers listed on the update form will be called. An ill child must be picked up immediately from school.

Should a child be injured, the wound will be washed with water and an adhesive bandage applied. Parents will be notified and depending on the severity of the injury, may be required to pick up the child. Emergency medical support may be called at the discretion of the director.

As a safety measure, children are not allowed to chew gum or hard candy at school. No medications can be stored in the child's backpack, this includes; chapstick, cough drops, lotions or ointments.

Toileting

STM Catholic Preschool is considered a preschool therefore we are not equipped for potty-training. **Children must be completely potty-trained**, this includes both urine and BM. Children must be in underwear and not in diapers, training pants or pull-ups. Independence in toileting includes the following:

1. Ability to control bladder and bowel.
2. Managing of own clothes, avoid overalls and jeans/pants with zippers or snaps. (2 ½ class will be assisted with clothing).
3. Ability to walk to toilet independently.
4. Seat self on toilet. Toilet independently including wiping (2 ½ & 3 year old children will be helped and encouraged by his/her teacher to become independent)

In the event that a child is found not fully potty-trained at the end of the first two weeks of enrollment, the parents will be notified that they will need to make other arrangements for preschool. The child may only return to STM Catholic Preschool upon completion of potty-training if space is available. Our Preschool Potty-Training Policy form must be signed and returned prior to the first date of enrollment.

Personal Belongings

Children should bring a tote bag/backpack daily. A change of clothes (including socks) along with a jacket should be kept in the backpack. Projects and communications will be sent home in the backpack. Classroom teachers will establish show and tell guidelines. Personal belongings, including money, should not be brought to school without prior permission from the classroom teachers. All items brought by your child should be clearly marked with their first and last name. STM Catholic Preschool is not responsible for damaged or lost belongings brought to school.

STM Catholic Preschool provides a rest mat for each child enrolled in the enrichment program. Parents are responsible for providing a sheet and optional blanket for their child when enrolled in enrichment. Bedding should be laundered no less than once per week.

Cubbies

Please do not place personal notes, birthday invitations, and party announcements in the children's cubbies. Staff are not allowed to distribute invitations or party announcements. Please refer to the directory to send them or personally hand-deliver them to the appropriate person.

STM Catholic Preschool is not responsible for personal belongings left in the cubbies.

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is a daily part of our curriculum. Children not well enough to participate should not be in school. Children need to come to school with appropriate outerwear. This includes coats, mittens, hats, and snow boots. Sandals and crocs are discouraged as they easily fall off as the children run, kick the balls and climb on the equipment. These shoes will restrict the areas where the children are allowed to play. Girls must wear shorts or leggings under their dresses will allow them to more fully enjoy the climbing equipment and modesty. Clothing needs to be marked with child's name. We will not have outdoor playtime during inclement and excessively hot weather but will have indoor gross motor activities. Guidelines of 27 F and 90 F will be used to determine if outdoor play is appropriate. Play surfaces will be checked regularly to assure safety.

Sunscreen

Colorado Rules and Regulations require that schools apply sunscreen to children prior to going outdoors for recess. To satisfy this requirement, younger children will have sunscreen applied to any exposed skin

(not covered by clothing) by their classroom teachers. Per regulations children that are four years of age and older may apply sunscreen to themselves with supervision prior to going outdoors for recess. The sunscreen that will be applied to your child by STM Catholic Preschool is Rocky Mountain Sunscreen KIDS 30 SPF

On the Authorization form required for enrollment you may authorize this practice, not authorize the application of this sunscreen or choose to provide your own sunscreen to be applied daily. If you choose to provide your own sunscreen, the bottle must be labeled with your child's FULL name and CLASS.

TV/Video Viewing

A video viewing permission form needs to be on file for each child. Parents will be notified prior to the showing of videos. Videos are used in conjunction with curriculum topics. TV viewing is not a part of the curriculum. Videos will be no more than 30 minutes and must have a G rating.

Program Directory

A program directory is available. *An authorization form must be on file to allow your child's personal information to be included on this list.*

Guidance

Guidance is used as a means of teaching appropriate behavior in a child's relationships to others and his/her environment. Positive instruction is used to foster a nurturing relationship between children, staff and families. Redirection is used as a first step. When age appropriate, the teacher or staff member will guide the child through what happened, his/her feelings will be discussed, and alternate ways of handling the situation will be discussed. A child may be separated from the group, within the classroom in a think about it chair. When the think about it chair is used, a guide of one minute for each year of age will be used. In repeated offenses, the child will be escorted to the office in the presence of the director and/or conferences with the parents will be used. Communication is the key; therefore, parents will be called in the event of biting, kicking, hitting, etc. or as deemed necessary by the director. Positive behavior is supported in a variety of ways. For example, verbal acknowledgement, "happy gram" notes sent home with details of positive behaviors and recognition through rewards such as stickers and helper assignments.

Positive child, staff and family relationships are cultivated through open communication, positive interactions and a nurturing classroom environment which fosters a sense of safety and trust as well as respect for each child's home language and culture. This practice creates a socially and emotionally respectful learning environment that allows children to learn at their own pace, form loving attachments and staff to tune in to each child's needs.

Teaching strategies will include large and small group activities to support positive peer interaction as well as social and emotional competence in children. For children requiring social or emotional intervention parents will be invited to discuss resources available and methods for accessing resources. Teachers will work collaboratively with parents to understand student needs and foster positive behaviors while reducing challenging behaviors.

Staff members are well trained and work hard to identify the social, emotional and developmental needs of each child. However, there are times when children may need additional care that our staff members are not able to provide. If we feel that your child's behavior endangers the safety of the other children, we will notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) and begin with a parent/guardian-teacher conference. To better accommodate your child, we would like to work with the family to develop a plan of action. During that time, if the child is a danger to themselves or other children, we may choose to suspend your child for a discussed upon period of time. Once the child returns to our program, if the child is still a

danger, then we will discuss if we are the best program to meet the needs of your child. Please refer to our detailed discipline policy for more information regarding the steps that are taken by our staff to work with children who are displaying challenging behavior. It is only as a very last resort that we would ask you to remove your child from our program.

Transportation

As carpools are formed, please provide the names and phone numbers of those adults authorized to drop off and pick up your child to the teachers and the office. Only adults with written (or a one-time verbal exception) authorization given to the director or/and teacher, will be allowed to check children in or out. St. Thomas More Catholic Preschool does not provide transportation for students to and from school.

Children may take walking trips to the Church or around parish grounds.

Safety Drills

Routine fire drills will be conducted in conjunction with St. Thomas More Catholic School. Evacuation plans are posted in each classroom. One adult will lead the class while another adult will be the last one out of the room. Class lists will be taken to account for children. The director will do a second roll based on daily sign in sheets.

Although tornadoes are unlikely during the school months, shelter in place drill procedures will be discussed and rehearsed with students. Children will go to the designated area of the building as approved by the fire department and wait for the all-clear signal.

Secure perimeter and Lock In drills are practiced several times per year. Secure perimeter drills will require all children to stay inside the building with all exterior doors locked. Access inside the building will not be allowed to those outside.

Lock In drills will require all children to stay inside their classroom with the classroom door locked and paper covering the windows on the classroom door. Children will be asked to remain quiet and window blinds will be drawn. Exterior building doors will be locked and no entrance or exit will be allowed until the drill has concluded or in the event of a true emergency, the scene has been declared safe.

In the case of an evacuation the relocation site is at the St. Thomas More Youth Center. The alternate site, should the youth center be unavailable or compromised, is Willow Creek Park on Otero Ave.

Child Abuse

The State of Colorado requires employees to report any suspected abuse or neglect of a child to the county department of social services or local law enforcement agencies. Agencies to contact are:

Arapahoe County Dept. of Human Services	303-636-1750
Douglas County Dept. of Health & Human Services	303-688-4825

Observing and Visiting

Parents are welcome to observe the classrooms for short periods of time. All visitors are required to sign in at the office stating the reason for the visit and the time they are present at the center. Proof of identification may be requested. Visitors are to wear a St. Thomas More visitor pass while on site.

Volunteers

St. Thomas More Catholic Preschool welcomes volunteers. **All volunteers must have a certificate from the Called to Protect Safe Environment training on file with the Preschool office prior to working in the classroom.** If you have taken this training in the past, it is the parent's responsibility to submit a

copy of the certificate to the preschool office, we do not have the ability to research this information. Volunteers are required to sign in with the preschool office *every time* and wear a visitor badge while they are in the building. In classroom volunteers will be for celebrations and parties only. Volunteer opportunities will include, office duties, book orders, library, project prep and special events. Project prep days are organized monthly by parents. Days are announced via email in advance.

Volunteer opportunities will be announced by the classroom teachers and will vary in frequency throughout the school year, based on need. We encourage volunteers to accept requests that are scheduled *periodically* to give others an equal opportunity to participate in classroom events. Teachers will create sign-up sheets for parents to offer their volunteer time on a given day. If you are volunteering during classroom parties, volunteers will not handle discipline issues, any concerns should be directed to the teachers. All discipline will be handled by staff members only. Volunteers are expected to respect confidentiality of all children and their families.

Room Parent - The classroom parent is chosen each year by the teachers based upon interest expressed on the volunteer form in the fall registration packet. The room parent organizes class activities for teacher appreciation week, organizes collections for staff gifts, leads volunteers on special event days and *if requested* by the teacher may communicate information about special event details and guidelines to other parents. The room parents from each of the classes will work together to organize teacher appreciation luncheons during the school year.

License and Inspections

The license is posted, and all inspection certificates are available for viewing upon request in the program office.

Concerns and Complaints

Please direct concerns to the director. Complaints may be filed with:

Colorado Department of Human Services
Division of Child Care
1575 Sherman Street
Denver, CO 80203
303-866-5958

Please print, date, sign, and submit the Parent Handbook Acknowledgement form located on the next page to the Preschool Office by the first day of school.

**THANK YOU AND WELCOME TO
STM CATHOLIC PRESCHOOL!**



***St. Thomas More Catholic Preschool
Parent Handbook Acknowledgement
2023 – 2024***

Family Name: _____

Children enrolled in STM Catholic Preschool Program:

I acknowledge that I have received the parent handbook. I agree to follow the school policies as stated in the handbook and in the event of changes mandated by the State of Colorado, Archdiocese of Denver, STM Catholic Parish School and Preschool.

Parent/guardian signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/guardian signature: _____ Date: _____

Please sign and return this form to the Preschool Office by the first day of school.