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# Early Childhood Handbook

**EC 3 ~ EC 4 ~ EC 5**

**2019 - 2020**



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# WELCOME!

Dear Early Childhood Families,

We welcome you to The Academy of St. Benedict the African. Our spirit has been a force of stability in this community for decades past and will be for decades to come. We are pleased to have you join our dynamic family. We look forward to our partnership, as we work together to provide a rich educational experience for your child.

We created this handbook to help you and your child become familiar with our customs, procedures, and policies. It is our hope that you will read it carefully, and share it with your child. Please let us know if you have questions; we are here to help you in any way we can.

It is important you know the statements in this handbook are subject to amendment with or without notice. We will attempt to keep the school families informed of all changes as soon as possible. Some changes may have to be made immediately due to unforeseen circumstances. All decisions are at the discretion of the principal.

We have an exciting school year ahead of us all! Away we GO!!!

Sincerely,

Patricia Murphy, Principal



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**Working together, hand in hand, we can delight in the joy of watching your child grow and learn!**

# About Our School

## Our Classroom Model

The Academy of St. Benedict the African has mixed-age early childhood classrooms, serving children from 3-5 years old. Classroom designs are based on research, which suggests students in mixed-age settings have increased opportunities to develop pro-social behaviors, intellectual abilities, and social participation.

In order to qualify for:

- **EC 3 & 4 – your child must be 3 before September 1<sup>st</sup>**
- **EC 5 (Kindergarten) – Your child must be 5 before September 1<sup>st</sup>**

The Illinois State Board of Education and the Archdiocese of Chicago Office of Catholic Schools certify our school.

Our ECE Classrooms are wonderfully exciting environments that encourage creativity and spark the curiosity of young children. Our students are provided the time to explore ideas they are eager to investigate. Classrooms are designed to provide children opportunities throughout the day for independent discovery as well as collaborative work with peers and teachers. Young children are excited to learn every minute of every day!

## **How We Nurture Excitement for Learning in Our Young Students**

Our teachers implement Teaching Strategies GOLD, the Project Approach and STEM Education (Science Technology Engineering Math) by using an appropriate framework to guide students through in-depth learning of real world topics and seeking to find solutions. Projects are a collaborative effort of teachers and students. They choose, design and do the work of the projects together, which provides meaningful and authentic learning experiences for our young children.

## Program Philosophy

We believe all children can be successful in our learning environment because we:

- welcome warmly, accept and support every child to ensure he or she feels physically and emotionally safe and comfortable.
- focus on the enhancement of every child's development and learning as we strive to meet his or her needs.
- encourage every child to be actively engaged in their learning.
- have a well-planned curriculum with appropriate learning and developmental goals that are both challenging and achievable.
- implement positive discipline strategies.
- provide parents opportunities to be actively involved with their child's education.

Our program is deeply rooted in well-researched teaching strategies focused on HOW young children develop and learn best. Our goal is to provide every child the opportunity to develop to his or her fullest potential and become life long learners. Our teachers and staff are well trained and highly knowledgeable in the field of early childhood development.

## What Our Day Looks Like

Our day has a familiar routine every day, because we know young children thrive best in an environment that is structured and has a consistent schedule. A typical day has the following components:

- Arrival
- Breakfast
- Morning Meeting
- Religion
- Small Groups
- Centers
- Gross Motor
- Read Aloud
- Music and Movement
- Lunch
- Nap
- Afternoon Meeting
- Dismissal/Transition to Extended Day

### Arrival

All **EC 3 & 4** students should be escorted to their classrooms and signed in by an adult. There is a **BINDER** for each classroom with the **Sign-in page for every family**. Upon entering the classroom, students are expected to hang up their belongings in their cubby, take out their **RED folder** (which must be brought to school everyday), place it in the Red Folder basket, wash their hands, and say, "Good morning!" to their teachers. Students will begin clean-up routines at 7:55 AM and go to the breakfast room at 8:00.

**EC 5** students should be escorted to Before Care OR breakfast OR their classroom, depending upon their arrival time, and **signed in** by an adult. There is a **BINDER** in Before Care and in each classroom with a **Sign-in page for every family**. Every student **MUST be signed in and signed out, by an adult, everyday**.

When students arrive at their locker, they are expected to hang up their belongings, take out their **RED folder** (which must be brought to school everyday), take it into the classroom and place it in the **RED Folder** basket, say, "Good morning!" to their teachers and find their place at a table.

### Breakfast

All **EC 3 & 4** students transition to the breakfast room at 8:00. If you bring your child to school after 8:00 AM, please walk your child downstairs to the breakfast room. If your child comes to school after 8:30, we cannot serve him or her breakfast.

All **EC 5** students transition to breakfast at 7:30. If your child arrives after 7:45, we cannot serve him or her breakfast.

### Morning Meeting

This is an important learning time. After breakfast, all EC 3, 4 & 5 students transition to their respective classrooms and have large group time. All-important direct instruction takes place at this time, related to our theme/unit as well as the alphabet, numbers, shapes, colors, weather and other concepts we are learning. SMART Boards are used during this time to enhance the

students' learning and engagement through hands-on learning activities. It is extremely important that your child is at school on time so they do not miss this prime learning time. This time sets the tone for the day socially, emotionally and academically.

The school day is **8:00AM – 3:00PM**. Every minute of the school day is vital learning time for students.

## **Religion**

Students in EC 3 and 4 are taught religion through developmentally appropriate strategies. It begins with HOW to treat others. The Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (PBIS) is a school-wide strategy used to create a positive, caring school climate centered on teaching students to be kind and respectful to others, and responsible for their words and actions. The components of this strategy are taught through modeling, role-play and stories. Students participate in a weekly prayer service and learn simple prayers of thanks.

Students explore the world in which they live as a part of our curriculum and are taught to respect and appreciate the wonders of the world in which they live, such as a flower, the rain, a bird, a rock, a swimming classroom goldfish or a caterpillar emerging from its chrysalis.

Students in EC 5 experience a similar curriculum, however a more formal approach of teaching religion begins in EC 5. Students are taught prayers, have a period of religion, participate in prayer services, and attend school liturgies, designed for young students kindergarten through fourth grade. PBIS as a behavior management strategy continues as does the exploration and appreciation of the wonders of the world in which they live. We focus on restorative practices with all students. Be on the lookout for a parent informational meeting.

## **Centers**

Students work in centers daily. During this time, students are learning how to interact with their peers in a positive manner as well as working on key skills important for young children. During this time, our students take turns practicing skills on iPads. There is a strong focus on literacy, writing and math skills as developing the important fine motor skills.

## **Gross Motor**

Our students either play outside or in the gym, depending on the weather, everyday. Students are encouraged to choose an activity they would like to play with their friends. We also have more structured activities during this time such as the parachute, bicycles and games.

## **Read Aloud**

We read books to the children everyday. The book is typically related to our theme. All books read to our students are high quality and often award winning. We focus on developing listening skills and understanding the story, identifying the main characters, deciding where the story takes place and recalling the sequence of the story. Children are encouraged to make predictions on what might happen next in the story. We learn about the author and illustrator and the parts of a book.

We highlight an author each month and read a collection of books by that special author. Exciting activities are planned and focused on a book by the author. We share this information with you in our weekly newsletter as Author of the Month, and encourage you to read books by the featured author at home.

## **Music and Movement**

Everyday we explore the musical arts. We experience a variety of musical instruments and enjoy different types of music for listening, singing and dancing.

## Lunch

All EC 3, 4 & 5 students transition to lunch at 11:30. We practice using good table manners and promote independence opening the food tray and milk, eating lunch, using utensils and napkins correctly, and finally, and cleaning up. After lunch, every student uses the bathroom and transitions to nap.

## Nap

All students nap after lunch and bathroom. Each student has a cot or a mat labeled with his or her name, which is wiped down with a bleach mixture every week. It is recommended students bring a blanket from home for nap. Please label your student's blanket with his or her name. Blankets will be sent home with students on Fridays to be laundered in an effort to keep our students illness free. Please launder his or her blanket and return it to school the following Monday.

**NOTE:** Blankets should be the size of a large bath towel and easy for your child to fold and store during the week. Please teach your child HOW to fold his or her blanket.

## Afternoon Meeting

Following nap, students may have center time and/or a meeting time with their teacher. This is time to review things learned and discussed earlier in the day. Skills are reviewed and practiced. We discuss our favorite part of the day, who we played with, what we learned in the centers where we worked and played. We also look ahead to the next day for an exciting peek at what is coming!

## Dismissal or Transition to Extended Day

Students are dismissed at **3:00 PM** and are escorted by teachers to the front porch. A parent **MUST sign out** his or her child the **BINDER** the teachers presents. Parental permission is necessary to release students to anyone other than parents/guardians. Please notify your child's teacher if someone other than you will be picking up your child.

Students NOT picked up by 3:15 will be transitioned to Extended Day. The students that normally go to Extended Day stay in the building with an Extended Day staff member to eliminate an unnecessary transition for the students staying for Extended Day. If you do not see your child outside, please talk to his or her teacher and she will bring your child to you. When picking up your child from Extended Day, his or her belongings will be in the cubbies on the stage in the gym. A parent **MUST sign out** his or her child in the **BINDER** in Extended Day.

## Dress for Play

EC 3 & 4 – NO school uniform required

EC 5 – School uniform required

Free play and exploration is an integral part of our philosophy. A significant body of research recognizes the impact of play on all areas of a child's development, including physical, social-emotional, and cognitive function. It serves as a natural way for young children to explore, create, discover, and learn about their world. As such, the children in our program are encouraged to use their senses and to "get messy". Please send your child to school in clothes that are washable

We recommend girls wear shorts, shorts, or pants girls since we do spend a portion of our day in active play.

Students MAY NOT wear flip-flops to school because it makes it extremely unsafe for students to run and play. We recommend gym shoes everyday. They are safe, comfortable and easy for play.

**BOOTS are NOT allowed in the classrooms** for healthy and safety reasons. Please be sure your child has extra school shoes when he or she wears boots to school.

## **Cold Weather**

Students spend time outdoors throughout the year. As the weather begins to change, please send your child to school with appropriate clothing to play outside.

## **Extra Clothes**

All students should have an FULL extra set of clothes at school (shirt, pants, socks, and underclothes) in case of an accident (whether a spill, or any other kind of accident). All items should be labeled with your child's name and be kept in their cubby or locker.

## **Birthdays**

We love celebrating birthdays!!! Please refer to the "Birthday" section under Health and Safety.

## **Emergency Procedures**

### **Fire Emergencies**

Students begin practicing fire drills early in the school year, and continue to practice on a regular basis until the end of school. Each of our classrooms has posted fire evacuation directions and maps.

### **Tornado Emergencies**

Tornado drills are also practiced and signs are posted in the room. If a tornado is in effect in the locality of the school, students will be directed to the designated areas. Please do not attempt to pick up your child from school if a tornado warning is in effect; please remain where you are safely until the alert has been discontinued.

## **Family Emergency Contact Phone Numbers**

Please be sure your child's teacher has your current phone number, as well as the current number of your Emergency Contacts, in the event you are not available. It is extremely important that we are able to reach you in an emergency situation.

If your phone numbers change, PLEASE notify your child's teacher IMMEDIATELY.

# **Our Families**

*We believe that in order to meet the needs of our students, we must work collaboratively with parents and families. You are your child's first teacher and we respect and value your role.*

## **Volunteering in the Classroom**

We love having parent volunteers in our classrooms! In order to spend time in our classrooms or go on field trips, all volunteers must be in **compliance** with the Archdiocese's Safe Environment requirements. **This includes an online background check and a VIRTUS training session.**

Please register online at [www.virtus.org](http://www.virtus.org) to attend one of these classes so you can spend time with your child and his friends at school! If you cannot make one of the dates at our school, there

is a list of dates and locations of other VIRTUS training sessions. Please see the office for further details.

## **The Transition to Our Classroom**

Transitions have an effect on parents and children alike and beginning school for the very first time, or coming to a new school, can be scary for everyone in your family. Children exhibit a wide range of behaviors and emotions when faced with significant changes in their lives. They may cling, whine, become more aggressive, or more withdrawn. Parents and teachers working together showing children they can trust and believe in one another, offer a foundation of support when the world suddenly seems to be a new and different place.

*What if my child has difficulty adjusting to school?*

If your child has difficulty transitioning to our program, we will work together to make this a less overwhelming time. Often, a repeated sequence of events such as walking your child into the classroom, saying a familiar phrase (I love you. See you after school!) and leaving with a cheerful goodbye will help with the adjustment to school. We generally recommend getting your child familiar with the routine as quickly as possible. Consistency and routine are crucial to young children who are adjusting to new circumstances.

## **Behavior Expectations**

*We believe that children learn best when they feel safe, encouraged, and respected by their teachers and peers.*

## **Behavior Management**

At the Academy of St. Benedict the African, we focus on preventing serious misbehaviors from occurring by setting clear expectations for our students. In our EC classrooms, school rules are taught through modeling, role-playing, and stories.

In addition, a positive, respectful approach to discipline is the hallmark of a Catholic school. Discipline strategies that respect the dignity and self-esteem of the individual student are essential to the philosophy of a Catholic school.

Our classroom management endeavors to be firm, consistent, impartial, positive, and sensitive to the needs of each student, as the self-esteem of students is maintained and enhanced. In an effort to support this environment, Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (PBIS) is a school-wide strategy used to create a positive school climate centered on teaching students to be kind, respectful, responsible and safe.

The classroom climate supports students as they learn decision-making skills related to their own behavior and choices they make. The environment encourages self-discipline and self-control.

## **Challenging Behaviors**

*What do I do if my child is demonstrating challenging behaviors?*

Most children demonstrate challenging behaviors at one time or another. However, after several weeks of school and exposure to routines and expectations, many of these behaviors diminish. If your child is still struggling after this time, your child's teacher will contact you to come up with a plan that will help ensure your child is engaged and learning throughout the school day.

*What are the behavior expectations for my child to participate on a field trip?*

Your child's safety is our primary concern. To attend a field trip, it is expected that your child can consistently follow directions and stay with the group. If your child is having a hard time following these expectations, you may be asked to be a "MANDATORY CHAPERONE" for your child.

If your child needs a mandatory chaperone, he or she **MUST** have an adult accompany them who is in compliance with ALL of the Safe Environment requirements (background check and VIRTUS training) to participate on the field trip. If there is no adult available that is in compliance, your child may be asked to stay home on that field trip day.

## **Health & Safety**

*We believe that a child's basic needs of health and safety must be met before any learning can begin.*

### **Preventing Illness**

*When do I keep my child at home?*

Please keep your child home if he or she has a fever, a persistent cough, skin rash, eye infection, or if he or she has vomited during the night or in the morning before leaving for school. A child who has been ill may return to school only when he or she is completely well. Please do not return your child to school until 24 hours have elapsed since his or her fever ended. A doctor's note may be required in some cases.

### **Required Documents**

*What medical information is needed for registration and attendance?*

A complete physical by a physician and an updated immunization record are required for all children entering the preschool program. A completed lunch application is also necessary for students to attend our program.

If your child requires medication during the school day, please ensure that all documentation is on file in the school office. Medication cannot be disbursed without written consent from a physician. Please check with the office for details.

### **Birthdays and parties in the preschool classrooms**

*How can I celebrate my child's birthday at school?*

Although we would love to host your child's birthday party, our schedules do not allow for parties during the school day. Due to our school's health policy, we cannot have any food brought into our school due to various, serious student allergies. You may choose to bring small non-food treats if you wish. These will be sent home with the students.

You may send in non-food items if you wish:

- Stickers
- Pencils
- Erasers
- Animal figurines
- Bubbles
- Mini packs of chalk or crayons

**Thank you for your support!**

## Confidentiality

All information about your family and your child is confidential. The information we collect will only be shared with the principal, teaching staff, and you, as parents. This information is only used to design classroom curriculum and/or any additional plans to help your child develop to his/her fullest potential.



**Working together, hand in hand, we can delight in the joy of watching your child grow and learn!**

## Early Childhood Handbook Acknowledgment

Thank you for being a part of our Early Childhood Program!  
We look forward to an exciting year!

Please return this form to your child's teacher.

\_\_\_\_ YES, I received a copy of the Early Childhood Handbook.

Your Child's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Birthday: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_