

2016-2017

THE FALCON'S NEST HANDBOOK

**St. Mary Catholic School
Early Childhood Center**

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**ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN A SETTING OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN VALUES
SINCE 1869**

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This handbook and the policies stated in it are intended as a guide to student activities and discipline. Since it is impossible to foresee all situations that may arise, the administration reserves the right to set and/or revise policy as needed throughout the 2016-17 school year. New policies and revisions will be communicated to parents. Parents and students are bound by the policies contained in this handbook and the procedures set forth by teachers.

MISSION, PHILOSOPHY, and GOALS

MISSION

The mission of the St. Mary Early Childhood Center (SMECC) is to ensure learning for all our students within the framework of Catholic, Christian Values.

SMECC PHILOSOPHY

St. Mary Early Childhood Center understands an appropriate preschool experience offers a nurturing environment where children have the freedom to play, learn, and interact with one another, discovering the wonders of God's world in the course of a child-oriented day. The SMECC provides children opportunities to form relationships - with God, teachers, and peers - and to grow in trust and respect while recognizing the worth of every individual. We recognize that young children learn effectively through discovery and exploration. Simultaneously, we extend children's thinking and knowledge by providing activities and resources based on developmentally appropriate learning goals. Children develop self-confidence in a learning environment that affords opportunities for success and provides the freedom to fail without fear.

GOALS

- To meet the individual needs of the young child by allotting time and opportunity in a planned Catholic educational environment for the spiritual, social, intellectual, emotional, and physical growth of the child.
- To give each child ample opportunity to work and play independently, to learn to live effectively with himself and others, to develop a sense of identity and worth, to experience success, and to enrich and broaden all areas of the child's development.
- To provide a religious education program and faith experiences that will nurture the young child's growth in love and knowledge of Christ.

ADMISSIONS

Applicants are accepted on the basis of the family's sincere interest in St. Mary Catholic School Early Childhood program, a willingness to support and cooperate with school policies and philosophy, and the ability to develop and thrive in the academic and spiritual environment. As the child's primary educators, parents are required to support their child's academic efforts and be active participants in their child's moral and social development at school.

Parental encouragement and involvement are vital to the child's success.

St. Mary Catholic School welcomes boys and girls of all races, religions, and ethnic origins. In the admissions process, preference is given to siblings of students presently enrolled in Kindergarten through 8th grade and active members of St. Mary Parish and all Catholic parishes, including families from out-of-town parishes. Admissions are processed according to the following priority:

1. Siblings of St. Mary Catholic School (K-8) or Early Childhood Program
2. Registered and active parishioners of St. Mary Catholic Church
3. Registered and active parishioners of other Catholic churches
4. Non-Catholics and Non-participating Catholics

Applicants are invited to visit the school and to meet the principal and other members of the staff and student body. Previous academic records may be reviewed, and parents are asked to provide as much information as possible regarding their child's educational experience, needs, and interests. In order to understand the child's educational background more clearly, the administration may contact the child's previous teachers and/or principal. Every effort is made to meet the needs of children of all learning styles and abilities.

St. Mary Catholic School is limited in its resources to provide individual programs or staff for exceptional students. The principal makes final decisions.

The admissions process includes registration forms, payment of registration and educational materials fees, and arrangements for the payment of tuition.

REGISTRATION, TUITION, and FEES

PreK Program -

- PreK3 - Child must be 3 years old by August 31, 2014 and potty trained.
- PreK4 - Child must be 4 years old by August 31, 2014 and potty trained.
- A copy of each child's latest health evaluation (including immunization record) is due in the school office before the first day of school.
- A NON-REFUNDABLE Registration/Educational Materials fee of \$275 per student is due at the time of registration.
- Tuition: Morning Program -\$2980 per student.
Full Day Program -\$5,000 per student
- Tuition payment arrangements must be made at the time of registration.
- Parents/Guardians are financially responsible for payment of the full amount of tuition agreed upon by the school and the parent/guardian.

Tuition may be paid in full or through 10 monthly payments from July through April through FACTS Tuition Management.

- In the case of a delinquent tuition payment without a change-of-status agreement with the school, the student may be denied admission to the classroom until a new agreement is established.
- For any items paid by check, there is a returned check fee of \$50.00 and an additional late fee payment of \$25.00 after the tenth of the month.
- Continued payment of tuition is required when children are ill or away on family vacations.
- Notice of the withdrawal of a student should be made by the parent in writing to the principal in advance of the withdrawal date. This enables the school to prepare the necessary information and settle accounts. As mentioned above, registration fees are non-refundable. Students who withdraw after the 1st quarter begins, but before the end of the first quarter, owe $\frac{1}{4}$ of the year's tuition. If a student withdraws after the beginning of a quarter, tuition will be owed for that quarter and any previous quarters.
- All funds designated for the school are to be placed in a marked envelope. The envelope should include the student's name, teacher's name, and an indication of the purpose of the money.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

We welcome parent involvement at St. Mary. There are many volunteer opportunities in the St. Mary Catholic School Early Childhood Program and we enjoy involving our parents as much as possible. Please do not hesitate to call your child's teacher and/or the Home School Association if you are able to volunteer. It is essential to make sure we are all working together as efficiently as possible.

If you would like to conference with your child's teacher, please make an appointment by note or through the school office. Remember that during school hours the teacher's priority is the needs of the children.

All visitors to the school, including volunteers, must enter the school by using the main entrance. All visitors must sign in at the office and receive permission before proceeding into the building. Forgotten items delivered to the school must be left in the school office. This avoids unnecessary interruptions while class is in session and provides greater safety for all of our children.

All volunteers and visitors to the school are required to have completed a Personal Information Form that will be issued by and kept on file in the office.

COMMUNICATIONS

A weekly letter with important school news and notes is sent to parents via email or in print, if preferred. Teachers will establish a consistent communication system that best suits their individual classes. Please keep your contact information current with the school office to ensure that you receive all correspondence. It is important that parents read all communication, especially since some announcements may require immediate attention.

The St. Mary Parish Bulletin contains a School News page which features school events, and the St. Mary School website and RenWeb contain a wealth of current information about school activities.

SCHEDULE

Office: 7:45 am - 3:30 pm daily

Students: 8:15 am - 12:00 noon, full day 8:15-3

A.M. DROP OFF PROCEDURES--RAIN OR SHINE

PreK students will enter the building at the front door of the Lower School. PreK teachers will meet and greet the children inside the entrance door. If the PreK child has a SMS sibling, they may come in with their sibling from 7:45 - 8:00 at the front door. PreK children who do not have a Lower School sibling should be dropped off by their parents between 8:00 - 8:15 at the front door of the Lower School. Please do not park at the curb closer to the Lower School between 7:30 and 8:00. This is our "drop-and-go" lane.

LATE ARRIVAL

Please take your child through the main entrance of the Lower School at 217 S. Fourth St. and check in at the office. A staff member or parent volunteer will escort your child to the classroom. We encourage you to have your child on time each day to promote a consistent routine for the classroom and your child.

DISMISSAL--RAIN OR SHINE

All PreK students will be dismissed from the classroom doors on the courtyard side of the building at noon or 3 o'clock each day. Parents will park and walk in to pick up their child. Please pick up your child promptly as teachers have other afternoon responsibilities.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Absence: If a child will be absent from school for any reason, the parent must notify the office or the teacher. You may leave a voicemail message on the answering machine.

Accidents: Parents will be informed of any accidents or injuries sustained by their child during the school day. Should a child experience a medical emergency, an attempt will be made to notify the parents. Depending on the severity of the problem, emergency personnel may be contacted and the child may be transported to the hospital.

Birthdays: Your child's teacher will inform you on the procedure for celebrating birthdays in the classroom. You may send in mini-cupcakes or cookies. To avoid hurt feelings, party invitations may be distributed at school if all of the children in the class are invited.

Child Abuse: St. Mary Catholic School and ECC abide by the Child Abuse laws of the State of North Carolina. This law mandates that all cases of suspected abuse and/or neglect be reported to Child Protective Services.

Clothing: Children should be dressed in clothing suitable for active play. All removable garments (hats, coats, sweaters, mittens) should be marked with the child's name. Assume children will be spending some time outdoors each day and dress them appropriately for the weather. For safety, sneakers with laces and/or Velcro are required. No slip-on shoes, Crocs, sandals, or open-toed shoes are allowed. We request that children wear elastic waist pants with no belts, no pullups, and no diapers. Please refrain from having your child wear graphic t-shirts, tutu's, and cowboy/cowgirl boots.

PreK School Bag - Children are required to purchase the blue pre-school tote bag. Backpacks or rolling bags are not allowed.

Crisis Plan: St. Mary School has a Crisis Plan in place to respond to various types of emergencies (lockdown, severe weather, evacuation). Teachers and staff are aware of and practice procedures that are designed to keep children safe. In the event of an emergency, the school will attempt to notify you through the ALERT NOW emergency communication system.

Discipline: Teachers use a variety of techniques in the classroom to support children's development, self-discipline, and social skills. Class rules and routines are discussed with the children early in the school year to ensure that

behavioral expectations are clear and consistent. Teachers model and reinforce appropriate behavior, redirect inappropriate behavior, and encourage positive strategies for resolving conflict. When necessary, the teacher may provide the child with a short time away from a group activity to reflect on his/her behavior and to encourage self-control. Parents will be contacted if a child is experiencing behavioral or social difficulties in the classroom. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

Emergency Drills: Children participate in monthly fire drills. Tornado drills are conducted during the month of February.

Enrollment Termination: St. Mary School Early Childhood Program has the right to dismiss any child whose needs are not being served by our program and/or whose behavior seriously affects the welfare of others. Prior to dismissal, parents will have been informed of these concerns, and efforts to resolve them will have been made.

Health Concerns: Parents must inform the St. Mary administration and the classroom teacher of any medical conditions that may require emergency medical treatment. If emergency supplies are necessary (i.e. epi pen, nebulizer), it is the parent's responsibility to provide these to the office along with a completed Student Medication Authorization form that has been signed by the child's physician.

Illness: Please keep your child home if she/he has a contagious disease or shows symptoms of illness including fever, vomiting, diarrhea, conjunctivitis (pinkeye), persistent coughing, heavy nasal discharge, or evidence of contagious infestation (lice). Children must be fever-free without fever reducing medications for 24 hours before returning to school.

Inclement Weather: St. Mary School follows the decisions made by the New Hanover County Schools on all school closings, including early dismissals and delayed openings. Please listen to the local radio and television news reports for the announcements and follow the announcement for the New Hanover County Schools.

The school reserves the right to change this policy as circumstances and needs arise.

Playground: All children must be attended by an adult on the playground. Parents must enforce the same safety rules that apply during school hours.

Safe Environment: To ensure the safety of all St. Mary students, background checks are completed on all staff members. In addition, all staff and volunteers must complete a Personal Information Form annually.

Snacks: Snacks should be healthy finger foods packed in Tupperware-type containers or Ziplock bags labeled with your child's name. Please send in water in spill-proof bottles only (not in plastic water bottles with caps). Please do not send in the following: applesauce, yogurt, jello, or other liquid snacks in insulated lunch bags or boxes.

Full Day PreK Lunch: All full day students are required to bring their own lunch to school.

Special Needs: A child's successful adjustment in the classroom may be affected by his/her special needs. Teachers will consult with parents in these circumstances, and outside professional consultation can be made available. The goal of intervention is the child's successful adjustment to the classroom. Classroom modifications can be made as long as the needs of all students can be reasonably met. A parent may be asked to spend time in the child's classroom to smooth the adjustment. If modifications and interventions are ineffective in helping a child to successfully assimilate into a classroom, St. Mary staff will be available to work with parents in finding appropriate and beneficial alternatives for the child.

Violent/Aggressive Behavior: St. Mary provides a safe, courteous, and orderly learning environment that respects the dignity of all students. Violence directed at self, other children, or adults will not be tolerated. Should a child engage in any form of violently aggressive behavior, the child's parent will be contacted to immediately remove the child from school that day. Dismissal from St. Mary is warranted if a child is sent home for aggressive behavior three times.

FAMILY CUSTODIAL RECORD

St. Mary Catholic School is finding an increasing number of families experiencing transitions in parental custodial relationships. For this reason, we find it necessary to clarify and restate the usual procedures followed by the administration and faculty in dealing with parents in such situations.

In two-parent families, it is assumed that both parents are living at the same address unless we have been notified otherwise. St. Mary Catholic School

personnel will therefore send home notices, communications, etc. with the child. It is assumed that both parents are communicating regarding the child and that all information is shared by and between the parents. This information includes, but is not limited to, conference appointments, report cards, interim reports, discussions with school personnel, and tuition statements.

In families experiencing separation of parents or pending divorce, the above information will be sent home with the child to whichever parent currently has care of the child. It is assumed that this information is shared by the parents and between the parents. Since this situation frequently impacts on a child's achievement and interactions at school, parents are asked to inform both the principal and teacher of this fact so that appropriate support can be given to the child. St. Mary Catholic School personnel cannot proceed on hearsay, rumors, or demands of a parent, but only with the appropriate documentation detailed below.

In cases of an actual divorce decree involving clear custody by one parent, the principal is to be informed by the custodial parent of this fact. A copy of the decree bearing the case number, the pages referring to custody and the relationship with the school, and the final page bearing the judge's signature are to be submitted to the principal. Unless the decree indicates otherwise, school communications will be sent home to the custodial parent*. Custodial parents should understand, however, that unless the divorce decree specifically limits the non-custodial parent's right to access the records, the non-custodial parent** has a right to the same access as the custodial parent. We will, unless instructed by a Court Order, release such records upon request to the non-custodial parent. "Records" includes official transcripts, report cards, health records, referrals for special services, and communications regarding major disciplinary actions. It does not include daily classwork and papers or routine communications sent through the children to the home or residence. In these cases, the custodial parent is asked to cooperate with the school and share this information directly with the non-custodial parent. This avoids time-consuming duplication of services. Further, you should realize that unless restricted by Court Order, any non-custodial parent has the right to attend any school activity of their child, which includes sports activities and class programs. Parents should keep each other informed as to these activities to avoid duplication of communications and to allow the school to better attend to the duty of teaching your children.

In cases of "joint custody" (shared parenting agreements), entitling both parents' access to school personnel and activities, it is assumed that one copy of communications and information will be sent home with the child and that this will be shared by and between the parents.

Regarding parent conferences in all custody situations: it is preferred and will be the general procedure that one conference appointment be scheduled “jointly” if both parents wish to be present. It is assumed that parents are able to set aside differences and to come together on behalf of their child for this time. A joint conference further insures that both parents are given the same information at the same time, thereby avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

In cases where joint conferences are clearly neither possible nor desirable by all parties involved, alternate arrangements may be discussed with the principal, subject to the approval of both parents, and further reviewed by St. Mary Catholic School’s legal counsel. Every effort will be made to keep communication open with both parents while at the same time avoiding duplication of services and excessive demands on the teacher’s time.

Visitation should generally begin at the home of one of the parents and not at school. It is hoped that visitation arrangements would reflect the sensitivity of both parents to the consistency and routines that foster security in a child and allow for the school responsibilities and homework to be taken care of during the school week.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. If you have any questions concerning these procedures, or circumstances you feel necessitate other arrangements, please contact the principal or pastor personally.

*The custodial parent is understood to mean the parent with whom the child resides.

** The non-custodial parent is understood to mean the parent with whom the child does not reside.