

**500**  
**Early Childhood**

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, Congregation for Catholic Education, (1988) states, “We need to think of Christian education as a movement or a growth process, directed toward an ideal goal which goes beyond the limitations of anything human. At the same time the process must be harmonious, so that Christian formation takes place within and in the course of human formation. The two are not separate and parallel paths; they are complementary forms of education which become one of the goals of the teacher and the willing reception of the students. The Gospel notes this harmonious growth in the child Jesus.” Luke 2:40 says “The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.”

Early Childhood Education should be a journey, not a race. On this journey, children travel at a different pace according to their individual development, background of experience and needs. Early Childhood education assists in the development of the total person-spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually. Therefore, Early Childhood educational experiences should provide opportunity for unifying all aspects of children’s lives.

### **Age Groups**

The age group within the scope of Pre-K and Kindergarten education shall be classified as follows:

- (1) Pre-Kindergarten-three, four and five year olds (must meet entrance dates)
- (2) Kindergarten-five year olds (must meet the entrance date)

The minimum age for entrance into Pre-K must be 3 years old (meet entrance date) and the child should be able to use lavatory facilities independently.

The entrance date depends on the local school district in which the parish school resides. In Philadelphia, the child must meet the entrance date of September 1. An assessment instrument is never used to exclude or include a child in an Early Childhood program. This is against the philosophy of Developmentally Appropriate Programs. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) opposes using any assessment instruments for this purpose. A school is not required to admit a child as a beginner whose chronological age is less than the school’s established admission age for beginners. (PA Regulations 51.62 (d))

**School Year**

Early Childhood programs are to adhere as closely as possible to the basic school calendar with kindergarten adhering to 180 days as required by Pennsylvania State regulations. Classes should open within a week of the regular school opening, and close no earlier than the Friday before the final week of school for the basic school program. The days immediately before the opening will allow time for teacher in-service (Archdiocesan or local), student assessment, as well as orientation for both parents and students. The days after closing will allow time for communication of information with the following year's teacher(s), parent conferences and eventual closure. It is necessary to provide adequate time for parent/ guardian conferences that will focus on the child's growth and development throughout the year. An end of the year conference with the child's parent(s) or guardian is strongly recommended rather than just sending a written report home in isolation.

**School Day**

The minimum length of daily instruction is:

Pre-Kindergarten: (three, four and five year olds) two hours

Kindergarten: two and one-half hours

Pre-first: three and one-half hours

Important: There has been a significant increase in full day Kindergarten and Pre-Kindergarten programs. A Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten may offer a full-day planned developmentally appropriate program in which the starting and dismissal times are identified.

**Schedule**

The schedule needs to be flexible enough to allow for spontaneous experiences, as well as meaningful integration of Early Childhood learning. Refer to Early Childhood Guidelines for half-day and full-day schedules.

**Opening and Closing of the School Day**

It is the responsibility of the administrator and the early childhood teacher to arrange the opening and closing procedures and to allow ample time for entering and leaving the building. Special attention should be paid to Early Childhood programs that begin or end at a time which differs from the school schedule.

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**Visitors** (refer to S 318)

Early Childhood Programs should, as far as possible, have an open door policy with regard to parent/guardian visits. It is mandatory for parents/guardian to report to the school office. Parents/Guardians should always be welcome. The school may institute appropriate regulations regarding non-interference with other children and with the Early Childhood program. Conversely, administrators should insure that only parent visitors or their designated representatives are allowed to visit. When the visitor is on official school business, the visitor should be accompanied by a school official at all times.

**Instructional Time**

Instructional time for students shall be the time during the school day which is devoted to instruction and activities provided as an integral part of the school program. Age and developmentally appropriate field trips are to be considered an integral part of this instruction. A walking tour to a specific location in the school's neighborhood (e.g. bakery, firehouse, doctor's office) is a multi-sensory approach to learning. (See information concerning field trips in Early Childhood Guidelines).

**P/P Personnel**

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**Teachers** (refer to Policy No. TP 210)

### **Assistant Teachers**

The following are required of all Early Childhood Assistant Teachers:

1. Be a graduate of an accredited 2-year college having specialized in Early Childhood, Elementary or Special Education.
2. Be legally cleared through the Criminal History Record Information from Pennsylvania State Police (Sp-4-164) hired after 11/86, Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (Form CY 113) hired after 7/1/96 and if a non-resident of PA, not living in PA for two consecutive years or hired after 4/1/07 FBI Fingerprint check.
3. Be examined by a physician to ensure that the person is free from communicable disease
4. Be included in in-service training

### **Aides**

An aide may be employed by a school to assist the teacher.

An aide shall meet the following qualifications:

1. Be a high school graduate, 18 years or older, with good physical and mental health, be of good character and possess personal qualifications for working with children.
2. Be legally cleared through the Criminal History Record Information from Pennsylvania State Police (Sp-4-164) hired after 11/86, Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance from the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare (Form CY 113) hired after 7/1/96 and if a non-resident of PA, not living in PA for two consecutive years or hired after 4/1/07 FBI Fingerprint check.
3. Be examined by a physician to ensure that the person is free from communicable disease

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**Aides (continued)**

4. Be included in in-service training
5. Be under direct supervision of a teacher at all times and not be permitted to assume independent responsibilities for a group of children.

**Teaching Responsibilities**

- ◇ Each class of children shall be instructed by a certified teacher.
- ◇ If an Early Childhood program is located in another facility other than the main school building or in an isolated part of the school building there must be a minimum of two adults present and available at all times. Children may not be left unattended, indoors or outdoors, at any time.
- ◇ Extra duties (lunchroom, yard, buses) should be compatible with the responsibility of the teachers in the Early Childhood program.

**P/P Pupil-Teacher Ratio**

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<b>Age Groups</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3&amp;4</b>	<b>3, 4, &amp;5</b>
Director or teacher	12	17	25	15	20
Director or teacher and one aide	17	21	30	19	26
Director or teacher, assistant teacher and two aides	22	25	30	23	28

Classes should not exceed these numbers and should be in accordance with 35 square feet per child of classroom space. Kindergarten should not exceed 30 students and should be in accordance with the 35 square feet of classroom space.

The educational program of Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten and Pre-first follow the Archdiocesan Early Childhood Guidelines. These guidelines meet the needs of the students, the educational objectives of Early Childhood education and are consistent with the philosophy of Catholic education.

Early Childhood teachers are required to prepare weekly plans that follow the guidelines and incorporate the concepts therein, through appropriate techniques and experiences.

### **Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

Activities are planned so the children participate to the fullest extent possible, most often individually or in small groups. The teacher is available to answer questions or stimulate children's thinking as they work on their own.

Teachers recognize and use the teachable moment to integrate children's learning whenever possible e.g., an unplanned event captures children's interest, such as the arrival of a tree-trimming crew, so the children go outdoors to watch, talk about why trees are being trimmed, try to figure what will happen to the wood chips, listen to the sounds of the equipment, smell the freshly cut wood and go back indoors to dictate or write about the experience.

Children and adults move about the classroom from learning center to learning center as they complete activities and talk with each other in informal but respectful ways. Children are motivated to learn because what they are doing is so interesting and builds upon their natural curiosity.

All areas of learning are integrated in meaningful, natural ways so children can see the usefulness of their emerging skills; e.g., children make a shopping list for a cooking project, distribute cups to each child for snacks and care for plants or small animals, keeping charts and records that use newly developing pre-math, pre-writing and pre-reading skills. Children are given a number of educational options regarding activities, and their choices are respected within the limits of space.

**Program of Instruction**

Learning experiences, both informal and planned shall include:

1. Religion activities
2. Gross motor skill development
3. Fine motor skill development
4. Language Arts
5. Mathematical activities
6. Perceptual activities
7. Science activities
8. Expressive arts including music, art and dramatic play
9. Social science and intercultural activities
10. Nutrition
11. Health and safety
12. Free play/outdoors

**Assessment** (Refer to Early Childhood Guidelines)

The purpose of assessing Early Childhood students is to discover what programs are suitable and to make instructional decisions to meet the needs of each student. Decisions that have a major impact on children should be based primarily on information obtained from observation by teachers and parents not on the basis of a single test score. The assessment of children's progress and achievement is to be used to plan curriculum, identify strengths and weaknesses, communicate with parents and evaluate the program's effectiveness. Data obtained from Terra Nova Standardized testing is used to determine program effectiveness.

It is the professional responsibility of administrators and teachers to critically evaluate, carefully select, and use assessments only for the purposes for which they are intended and for which data exist demonstrating validity. Accurate interpretation of assessment results is essential. It is the obligation of teachers to become informed about measurement issues, to use results responsibly and to administer the instrument within proper time limits. Please interpret results without making undue claims about their meaning or implications.

The testing of students and the interpretation of results must be conducted by individuals who are knowledgeable about and sensitive to the developmental needs of young students. The teachers should be qualified to administer the tests. The testing must recognize and be sensitive to the individual diversity of the students.

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### **Instructional Materials**

There shall be instructional materials and indoor/outdoor equipment compatible with the school's philosophy, objectives and teaching methodology which will accommodate the number of children enrolled in the school.

**P/P**                    **Discipline**

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(Refer to SP 319)

Children are expected to gain increasing control of their own behavior. Rules are to be realistic and designed to promote cooperation and respect. Educators are to accept that it is natural for young children to display an appropriate noise level, to move about a lot, to express their enthusiasm vigorously and to want to finish their projects before moving on to something else. Movement, enthusiasm and completion of projects are all typical early childhood behaviors.

Teachers promote respect for each other and are sensitive to children's desire to please adults. Teachers recognize that children take criticism very seriously and personally, so they refrain from reprimanding in front of others and never use labels such as bad or naughty. Instead, teachers talk with individuals about what happened and try to help the child come up with better ways to handle the situation or similar events.

Teachers recognize the learning value of recess, and time in the library, as well as other opportunities for children to get fresh air, and to learn from experiences outside the classroom. Children are never denied these activities as punishments.

## **Handbook**

An Early Childhood handbook is developed at the local level and should be given out at registration explaining the philosophy, goals and policies of the program.

## **Parent Conferences**

It is important to keep the lines of communications open and clear. At the time of registration, it is recommended that a meeting be held to greet parents/guardians and explain the developmentally appropriate philosophy, goals and policies. The student should be present at the initial parent/guardian registration meeting. Individual parent/guardian conferences should be provided at least twice a year. Parent meetings provide an excellent opportunity for teachers to share information regarding the Early Childhood program. Meetings offer an opportunity for teachers and parents to discuss how each child learns and to emphasize the importance of good home and school communication. An end of the year conference is an opportunity for the teacher to share with parents the growth of the child throughout the year.

## **Telephone**

Telephone calls can be an efficient and effective means of communicating with parents on a topic that needs immediate attention either for praising a student or sharing a concern about a student. It is suggested that phone calls be documented and dated.

## **Calendar**

The calendar may be used to keep parents informed of the early childhood curriculum, activities, field trips, etc., which correspond to it. The calendar also helps parents to establish home activities which are more closely connected with the learning activities presented in school.

## **Newsletter**

Newsletters share information about current and future events. They also provide an update on child growth and development. Newsletters include announcements about child development, field trips, and other pertinent school activities.

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## **Progress Report**

Progress reports are used in conjunction with parent conferences to provide the teacher with an opportunity to explain the meaning of the child's observable progress to the parent/guardian. The progress report should be as objective as possible. It should be used to reflect the child's developmental progress.

### Sample rubric

Does this well  
Working on this now  
Experiencing difficulty

### Sample rubric

Proficient  
In process  
Not yet

(Refer to CIA 608)

Every trip should have an educational purpose. Young children learn through play and through the environment. It is important for them to receive exposure to the world outside the classroom, since this is part of their education. Field trips are a vital part of the child's experience in Early Childhood. It is suggested that children become familiar with the local neighborhood before the teacher plans for longer trips. Field trip permission forms must be required for all trips (Refer to Early Childhood Guidelines).

The basic principles involved in successful field trips are planning, choosing the kinds of trips, recruiting volunteers, implementing the plan and following through after the trip. Basic principles are the same whether trips are to be walking ones, or children are to be transported by bus or car.

Before a field trip is planned, the teacher obtains permission of the principal. At this time the purpose, objectives, and goals are discussed. The teacher then sends home parental/guardian consent letters and asks for volunteer parent/guardian helpers. The teacher should be well informed about the trip, check safety hazards, toilet facilities, food, parking areas, and the time scheduling of the trip. It is extremely important to plan a "dry run" of a trip and the person being visited to assure the appropriateness of what will be said, how it will be conveyed, and exactly what will be shown.

On the day of the trip, students should be divided into small groups with one adult accompanying each group. Every child must have a tag with the school's name and phone number on it. The teacher who is responsible must carry emergency information for every student and emergency contact numbers. Each group should have different color name tags to match the adult in charge. The children will know which parent/guardian is in charge of their group by matching colors. Follow-up activities to enrich the experience are very important.

(Refer to SP 315)

The handbook should explain how parents/guardians will be contacted in the event of an emergency, illness or other problem. Parents should be called at home and/or at work. If the parent cannot be reached, emergency contacts indicated by the parent on the emergency or registration form should be contacted. The absolute minimum of emergency contacts permitted should be three.

It is a good idea to include an emergency plan in the handbook. If the building housing the Early Childhood program should be evacuated or closed, the location that the children will be taken to must be identified and the procedures for parents to contact a school official must be outlined.

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**Custody**

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(Refer to SP 316)

## **Environmental Health and Safety**

Provisions for the health, physical welfare and safety of pupils shall be those prescribed and required by the Department of Environment Resources or by the Department of Health of the local county.

**Immunization** (refer to SP 305)

### **Medical Examinations**

A complete medical examination, including appropriate visual and hearing evaluations, shall be made by a licensed physician at the expense of parents prior to the original entrance of the pupil into school. The school may provide the necessary forms. "Original entrance" means entrance into kindergarten if it is part of the school or first grade if the school does not have a kindergarten.

### **Dental Examinations**

A dental examination shall be provided for a student upon original entry into school and in grades 3 and 7 if locally applicable. The school may provide the necessary forms.

### **Health Records**

Health records shall be kept in the school building where the students attend school. The original health records shall follow a student when transferring to another school.

School nursing services shall be provided for students in grades K through 12. The services may be provided through the public school system in which the private school is located or by a certified school nurse employed by the private school.

### **Nutrition**

Handbooks should include some information concerning the importance of good nutrition. If parents are required to provide breakfast and/or lunch for a child, suggestions as to appropriate food choices should be made. If the Early Childhood program provides meals and/or snacks, the types of foods should be discussed. Menus should be posted in the classroom or otherwise made available to parents.

(Refer to S 1016)

## **Facilities Approval**

The buildings or schools shall conform to applicable fire and panic requirements of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or its political subdivisions.

## **Preparation for Fire Drills**

Fire drills are mandatory and should be held once a month. All drills should be given with advance notice for Early Childhood students. Young students need a great deal of preparation to be able to handle the drill. Many children at this age cannot differentiate between fantasy and reality and should be reassured by the teacher.

## **Lighting**

Artificial lighting facilities shall be adequate and safe and shall provide the minimum foot-candles required by the governmental authorities having jurisdiction over such matters.

## **Heating**

Heating facilities shall be sufficient to provide for the maintenance of normal room temperature in all rooms occupied by students, exclusive of gymnasiums and rooms used for sleeping purposes, when the outside temperature is less than normal room temperature.

When mechanical ventilating facilities are not used, windows shall be used and equipped for ventilating purposes.

## **Cleanliness**

Cleanliness and orderliness in the indoor and outdoor areas of schools shall be maintained at all times.

## **Floor Space**

### **Indoor**

There shall be a minimum of 35 square feet of floor space per child in the indoor classrooms, exclusive of offices, sanitary facilities, storage spaces and other auxiliary rooms. Classrooms shall have a minimum height of 8-foot ceilings.

### **Outdoor**

There shall be a minimum of 60 square feet of accessible space per child in the outdoor activity area, which shall be free of hazards. Outdoor play areas which are adjacent to traffic, steep banks, water or other unsafe areas shall be fenced.

## **Restrooms**

There shall be at least one flush toilet and one washbowl for every 15 children. If the toilet and washbowl facilities are not child size, platforms or steps of proper size shall be provided.

## **Heating**

Radiators, fireplaces and heating and cooling devices within the indoor classrooms shall be equipped with shields or guards for providing protection against contact injuries. Kerosene, electric or other types of portable heaters may not be used as heating devices in the classroom.

## **Furnishings**

Wall and floor coverings and furniture shall be of such type and quality as will assure safe and sanitary conditions. Only fire retardant materials may be used on classroom doors and windows.