

St. Helen Catholic School

Preschool Handbook



2347 W. Augusta Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60622
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Dear Families,

We would like to welcome you and your child to St. Helen Preschool. Our curriculum is designed to meet the developmental needs of a three and four year old child. We will work to create a warm nurturing environment from which your child will grow intellectually, spiritually, physically, emotionally, and socially. As a Catholic school we believe that all of our students are children of God and we are committed to instill the values of Christian life in each child. Our classrooms are designed to reflect best practice in Early Childhood Education which includes ongoing professional development for teachers and a class ratio of 1:10.

We appreciate and believe that the primary educator of a child is their parents. We welcome your participation through open communication. We want to work with you to make your child's preschool year at St. Helen Catholic School a positive and enriching experience. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Eva Wojkowski
Teacher

Mrs. Jeanette Pena
Teacher

Miss Joanna Ladner
Teacher

Mission Statement

To provide a nurturing environment in which children will grow intellectually, spiritually, physically, and socially.

Philosophy

St. Helen Preschool is a child-centered program designed to meet the needs of the three and four year old. The curriculum is based on learning through creative and dramatic play and hands-on activities. Through this learning, the child will develop necessary readiness skills in mathematics, reading, and writing. The child will be enriched in activities presented in a safe and nurturing environment. As a unique child of God, each child will be applauded for their own talents.

Goals

It is our goal to provide a rich program which is developmentally appropriate where a child can flourish and grow at their own pace. We recognize that each child, when allowed to explore and experience in a nurturing and safe environment, grows intellectually and emotionally.

It is our goal to instill the value of life in each child and to celebrate each day as a gift from God. The child will appreciate that God is their loving friend.

It is our goal to provide adequate time for play within each day whereby a child will be challenged to develop large and small motor skills, social skills, and creative expression which will lead to reading, math, and writing readiness.

Children grow when they feel secure, loved, and nurtured. It is our goal to provide this atmosphere which will encourage the child to try new experiences.

It is our goal to allow a child to feel secure enough to make mistakes and try again. We will encourage a growth mindset which will carry with them through their life.

It is our goal to provide a variety of experiences throughout the day for the child to become actively involved. These experiences may include indoor and outdoor play, individual and group activities, teacher directed and child initiated activities, and spiritual development.

It is our goal to teach children to solve problems with a friend peacefully. We also want them to learn responsibility for cleaning and instill good health habits.

It is our goal to help each child develop the virtue of kindness and concern in their relationships with others.

Arrival and Departure

Starting when the bell rings at 7:45AM, students may start to enter classrooms. Families may park in the Church's parking lot or find a spot on the street and walk up to the main doors on Augusta Blvd. for drop-off. We appreciate the effort put forth to have your student arrive on time in the morning. Arrivals after 8:00AM cause a disruption to the classroom. Several late arrivals will result in a meeting with the student's family to discuss possible ways to improve arrival times.

Dismissal for all Preschool classes will be from the side gym doors in the Church's parking lot with pick-up from 2:40 - 3:00PM. If you are running late, please email your student's teacher or call the office and your child will be waiting for you in their classroom until 3:00PM. If you arrive after 3:00PM your child will be in Aftercare. If your child is being picked up by someone other than you, please indicate that in writing to their teacher. Children are not allowed to go with another adult unless there is written confirmation or that adult is on the designated form. If plans change during the day then an email to the teacher or a phone call to the office is necessary. If staff do not recognize the individual calling for your child, identification may be required. If there are doubts about the person picking up your child a phone call will be made to you.

Beforecare (7:00 - 7:45AM) and *Aftercare* (3:00 - 6:00PM) are offered as options for an additional fee. Please contact the main office for more information.

Adjusting to Preschool

Separation anxiety is a normal stage of transition for many children of Preschool age. To help in easing the transition, we suggest that you tell your child that you will be dropping them off for a period of time and that you will return to pick up when school is over. Please discuss at home what your child can expect at school (i.e. playtime, recess, lunch, nap, etc.).

Assessment and Parent/Teacher Conferences

Each child will be assessed through daily observation, which is ongoing throughout the year. A portfolio of work your student has completed will be compiled and then given to you at the end of the year. Written assessments will be sent home two times during the year; at the end of the second trimester and again at the end of the year/third trimester. Conferences will also be held during the year. If at any time during the year you have a question, please contact your child's teacher.

Attire

For the 2025-26 academic year, Preschool children are encouraged to wear the school uniform and required to wear it with the start of the 2026-27 academic year. The children have a very active day and the comfort of the uniform or play clothes are appropriate attire. All St. Helen students must wear socks and sneakers; Velcro or slip-on shoes are required for students that are unable to tie their own shoes.

Please dress your child appropriately for the weather including sufficient seasonal outerwear. Classes do go outside each day for fresh air and recreation as long as weather permits. Your child's name should be clearly written on all coats, boots, hats, scarves, etc. A complete change of clothes is required of each child, to be kept at school in the case of an emergency; they do not need to be the school uniform. Please include underwear, shirt, pants, and socks. The items of clothing should have your child's name clearly marked. If the clothes are used, please replace the items the next day. Schoolwide policies in regards to hair, etc. apply to Preschoolers (see the school handbook).

Restroom Independence / Accident Policy

Children enrolled in preschool must be toilet trained before attending St. Helen. Children must be wearing underwear the entire day, including naptime. A child having accidents daily would not be considered toilet trained. Please note that wearing pull ups is NOT considered toilet trained.

Why do children have to be toilet trained before they begin preschool?

- There are strict standards for changing and disposing of wet or soiled diapers/pull ups and our classrooms/staff are not licensed for this.
- When an adult is busy changing a child's soiled clothing, it is taking away from learning time for all students and it removes one adult from the direct supervision of and interaction with the rest of the class.

We do understand that even toilet trained children will occasionally have accidents. By definition, "accidents" are unusual incidents and should happen infrequently. In these instances, the teachers will verbally assist students when changing their clothes, encouraging independence as much as possible.

A toilet trained child is a child who can do the following:

- Communicate to the teachers that he/she needs to go to the restroom before they need to go
- Alert him/herself to stop what he/she is doing, to go and use the bathroom
- Pull down his/her clothes and get them back up without assistance
- Wipe him/herself after using the toilet
- Get on/off the toilet by him/herself
- Wash and dry hands

- Postpone going if they must wait for someone who is in the bathroom or if we are away from the classroom
- Wake up during nap time should they need to use the bathroom

As a whole class, there are many times built in throughout the day and before nap time that the class will go to the restroom and students will be encouraged to try to go. A teacher will assist children as needed, but children should be able to complete toileting activities independently. This is an issue which protects all concerned.

Please have your child dressed in clothing that he/she can easily manage independently.

Each classroom will ask for a complete change of clothes. These will be left at school in case of accidents and returned at the end of the school year. Please provide a seasonally appropriate change of clothes (pants, shirt, underwear, socks) in a Ziploc bag marked with the student's name.

Parents will be notified if a child has a toileting accident.

A child will not be considered toilet trained for our preschool program if the child continues to consistently have toileting accidents from when starting school.

If so, the following policies will be in place for children who have accidents:

- If one or two accidents occur in one week, the parents will be notified with the understanding that the issue needs to be addressed and corrected.
- If three or more accidents occur in one week, the parent will be notified with the understanding that the child will have to stay home at least one week or longer until he/she is completely toilet trained.
- If multiple accidents occur in one day, the parent will be notified on that day; and if not corrected by day three, the child will have to stay home at least one week or longer until he/she is completely toilet trained.
- If three or more accidents occur in a three week time frame, the parent will be notified with the understanding that the child will have to stay home at least one week or longer until he/she is completely toilet trained.

Please note that this policy is not in place to shame or punish a child, or inconvenience primary caregivers. Rather, cleaning accidents in the school setting is time consuming, and the time that teachers spend attending to and cleaning accidents is time that they are not spending interacting with children and facilitating the curriculum in a safe manner. This policy is intended to ensure the safety and happiness of children and staff at St. Helen School.

Child Protection

All staff members are required by law to report suspected incidents of child abuse. It is not the intent of the school to become involved in individual family matters; however, in some cases when the physical and/or emotional safety of any child is in suspect, the suspicion will be communicated to the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Details regarding any individual child's protection are a matter held in strictest confidence by all adults involved. The calls are anonymous.

Classroom Involvement

Family members are encouraged to be involved in the Preschool program. Involvement may include being a guest reader, assisting in the classroom, chaperoning a field trip, donating items, or helping with projects that may assist the teacher. Your child's teacher will be happy to give you ideas to help you be involved in your child's preschool experience.

Any parent that volunteers at school or on field trips will need to complete an online background check through the Archdiocese of Chicago. Instructions for completing this are available by contacting the main office. The background check must be completed at least one week prior to the volunteer date.

Communication

We recognize that the parents are the primary educators of their child, therefore we promote ongoing communication between home and school. Schoolwide communication will go out in a weekly email newsletter each Thursday. Each Preschool teacher will also send weekly communication, updating families on their child's classroom activities. If you are not receiving these email communications, please let the main office and/or your student's teacher know.

If there is a concern or questions regarding your child's preschool experience, please contact your child's teacher. Emails will not reflect the teacher's opinion and remain objective in nature. We are unable to discuss other students, but will be able to talk about your own child.

Behavior Policy

Children are guided toward acceptable behavior in order to maintain a safe and productive learning environment. Preschool classrooms will also follow the school-wide discipline policy as updated in the Family Handbook and in school-wide communications. The most important goal of discipline is to help children gain self-control over their actions. Teachers will help guide students in learning the

consequences of their actions, assuming responsibility for their actions, and developing an awareness of the rights of others. Simple understandable rules will be used with the children.

Effective forms of discipline are as follows:

1. Redirection to another activity
2. Loss of privilege or activity
3. Assisting students in resolutions of conflicts
4. Anticipation and intervention prior to a disruption
5. Praise of positive behavior/positive reinforcement

Biting: If a child bites another child or an adult, the bitten child/adult will be tended to, the biter will be removed from the situation, and an incident form will be filled out. All involved parties will be notified by a phone call. The child who bit may be asked to be picked up from school depending on the individual circumstances. They may also be required to stay home the following school day. If a student has more than one biting occurrence during the year, the guardians of the student will need to meet with the teacher and administration to determine what the next course of action will be. Each situation is unique, but a student with three biting incidents may be asked to unenroll from the school.

Health

Accidents/Illnesses

Please refer to the *St. Helen Family Handbook* for more information if your student shows symptoms related to Covid. **Per the Archdiocese, “individuals with symptoms of COVID-19 or any illness should stay home while sick.”**

In the event that a child becomes ill or injured at school, the parent or a person designated by the parent will be asked to come to the school for the child. If a child has an accident or an incident at school, we will notify you by telephone and provide a written report of what happened. A student who has vomited at school or has a temperature must be sent home; the student may return to school after 24 hours if their fever or vomiting has subsided and no other symptoms are present.

Thank you for your patience as guidelines are continuously updated. Please be sure to refer to information regularly sent from the school office.

Communicable Disease Control

Rules and regulations regarding communicable disease control shall be enforced as required by the Illinois Department of Public Health. Parents should notify the school if their child has a communicable disease or health concern which would include chicken pox, strep throat, pink eye, hand foot mouth disease, and head lice.

Physical/Immunization Requirements

A complete physical exam by a licensed physician is required for all children entering preschool; it should be reported on forms prescribed by the Illinois Department of Public Health and dated no earlier than six months prior to enrollment. The physical report must include all required immunizations and all must be up to date. A T.B. test must be included in the exam.

Emergency Information Form

Each year parents are required to supply the school office with emergency contact information including insurance and Doctor information. Please inform the school office if emergency contact names change during the year as well as phone numbers. Cell phone numbers must be kept current.

Meals and Snacks

It is important to provide healthy meals and snacks for your child. Your child will be encouraged to try various foods at lunchtime; however, they will not be forced to eat food that they do not want. Refrigeration and microwave access is not available for students, so including an ice pack or packing in a thermos may be helpful. **Students are required to bring in a reusable water bottle filled with only water each day.** It will be sent home each day to be washed.

Each day your student will also need to bring in an individual snack. Please make sure the snack is packed separately from your student's lunch. If the snack requires a fork or spoon, please supply what is necessary. If your student will be staying for aftercare, please also pack a second snack each day.

Please inform us of any special dietary needs prior to our first day. This includes any food allergies.

Snack Suggestions:

Fresh Veggies / Fruit

Unsweetened Cereal

Mini Bagel

Raisins

Whole Grain Crackers (i.e. goldfish, Ritz, veggie straws)

Graham Crackers

Pretzels

Granola Bars

String Cheese

No Sugar Jell-O or Pudding

Applesauce pouches

Yogurt

Naptime

Each day the students will have rest time for around an hour and a half each day. We have found this resting period very beneficial to students. You may send a small blanket and pillow for your child to use on their cot. Blankets and pillows will be sent home biweekly to be washed. Please do not send a full size pillow or full size sleeping bag as we do not have enough room to store this for each child.

Birthday / Party Invitations

Each student will have a special day in class to celebrate their birthday. This day will be as close as possible to their actual birthday. Summer birthdays will be celebrated towards the end of the school year or for their half birthday (more information will be given by your student's teacher). We will do our best to make this day special for your child. Students are able to bring in a small party favor or a goodie bag to be sent home; a favor is not required, however. Food items such as cupcakes, cakes, ice cream, etc. are not allowed. Please see your child's teacher with any questions.

If you are hosting a party, please send the invitations through email. Paper party invitations may only be distributed in the class if every child is invited.

Special Events and Field Trips

Parents are informed well in advance of a field trip. The trips are planned as an extension to a learning experience or as an experience which will enhance your child's cultural literacy. At times, your child may walk to Butterfly Park which is a short walking distance from the school.

Schoolwide Volunteer Opportunities

All parents are highly encouraged to share their time and talent as a volunteer; there are many opportunities to help. The St. Helen Carnival, held at the start of the school year, is a major event. There are also opportunities to volunteer/coach within the student athletic program, Parent Association, and BOSH (Benefactors of St. Helen). As opportunities arise, they will be communicated to the school community in the weekly Thursday email updates. Please consider a leadership role with the parent organization, which funds building renovation and new programs for the students.

The parent association promotes communication between home and school as well as various family social opportunities. The group coordinates fundraisers throughout the year that enhance the educational offerings as well as the classroom environment. Monthly parent group meetings are held over Zoom and the link is included in email communication from the school.