

Saint Mary Catholic
Preschool Handbook Addendum
2026-2027



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HISTORY

For over 70 years, Saint Mary Catholic School has served the people of the Fort Walton Beach community and surrounding areas, providing academic instruction and helping to develop the religious faith of generations of Catholics. Beginning with the founding families, who sacrificed to build the first school, parents have continuously recognized the value of providing a Catholic education for their children. Many parish pastors, religious and lay teachers have toiled to assist them in this work. Today, the school proudly upholds the traditions of the past while preparing students to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The school's excellence is recognized, in part, through its accreditation through the Florida Catholic Conference. Striving always to emphasize faith development and the formation of sound values under the challenging conditions of our times, SMCS will continue its tradition of service long into the future.

MISSION STATEMENT

Dedicated to Catholic values, Saint Mary Catholic School is a Christ-centered educational community committed to academic excellence, spiritual growth, individual responsibility, and service to others.

PRESCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

The Saint Mary Catholic School Preschool mission is to provide a quality, caring, child-centered and developmentally appropriate program (for children ages 3 through Pre K) in a secure environment which is based on Catholic values and traditions. We strive to nurture a love of God, respect of self and others, and a spirit of learning and sharing through a cooperative relationship with our school and parish families.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Saint Mary Catholic School Preschool is a part of Saint Mary Catholic School and operates under the guidelines of the Florida Catholic Conference (early childhood programs) and Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten. The purpose of the preschool program is to enable the child to:

- a. Develop an awareness of God and the world around them.
- b. Develop an understanding of prayer in our daily lives.
- c. Develop and maintain a positive feeling about self.
- d. Develop and maintain the ability to create and to learn.
- e. Expand awareness of the world around them.
- f. Develop language through listening, speaking, dramatic play, and music.
- g. Develop an awareness of the alphabet and the sounds that letters make.
- h. Develop an awareness of numerals and counting.
- i. Develop the ability to recognize basic colors and shapes.
- j. Develop physical growth through motor activities and learning about proper nutrition.
- k. Develop respect and concern for the rights and property of others
- l. Develop the ability to express verbal and nonverbal feelings in acceptable ways.
- m. Develop self-help skills in a group of children that are of a similar age.
- n. Develop skills needed to be a friend.

SCHOOL POLICIES

MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION

The teachers of Saint Mary Catholic School integrate multicultural education into other disciplines as the opportunity presents itself. They are constantly looking for areas where multicultural education might be presented to students as part of a regular lesson. Teachers are given instruction in multicultural education and various means of integrating this instruction into core curriculum disciplines. The teachers are taught to recognize opportunities to present multicultural education in all classes.

ACCREDITATION

Saint Mary Catholic School is accredited through the Florida Catholic Council.

ADMISSION

Saint Mary Catholic Preschool respects the dignity of the child and his/her right to an education. No child is to be prevented from being accepted into this school because of race, sex, nationality, ethnic origin, or religious affiliation. Saint Mary Catholic School reserves the right to assess and place new students, as staff and administration deem appropriate.

As openings become available, the following priorities will be used to accept students:

1. Students who have older siblings enrolled in Saint Mary School.
2. Members of Saint Mary Parish.
3. Members of other parishes
4. Non-Catholic students
5. Students entering Preschool must be three (3) years of age by September 1st and be able to perform their own toileting needs.
6. All VPK students must have a voucher before the first day of school and attend on the first day of school.

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Some children experience anxiety during separation. This is normal and quite common, especially in new situations. This can also occur unexpectedly at any time during the year. We will be ready with hugs and reassurances to ease these moments. Parents are welcome to walk children for the first 2 weeks. When departure time is imminent, parents are asked to inform the teacher, say goodbye to the student and leave without fanfare. We understand this can seem traumatic, however, in most cases, the student recovers quickly and becomes absorbed in preschool fun. Parents are invited to wait out of sight or call later for reassurance.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Saint Mary is a Catholic Preschool. Religious education will be integrated into the curriculum. Prayers will be said on a regular basis. Saint Mary Preschool is open to children of ALL faiths whose parents desire and support this type of program.

PRESCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICY

Our goal is to guide the child towards self-discipline. Because we are teaching children at various stages of development; techniques used may vary from case to case. The following may be used when children display inappropriate behavior:

- Teaching the skill that is lacking, or the rule being broken.
- Natural consequence. (A child who is splashing at the water table gets shirt wet.)
- Imposed or logical consequence. (Child splashing at water table is asked to clean up the floor and/or leave the water table.)
- Child removed from the situation in the classroom.
- Removal from the classroom. If a child's behavior becomes so disruptive that it prevents learning from happening or if the child is a danger to himself or others; the preschool staff will meet with parents to design and implement a plan for modifying the behavior. This plan will be presented to the school administrator and progress will be reported. If these efforts are not successful, enrollment may be terminated. This decision will be made as a last resort by the school staff, the school administrator and Saint Mary's pastor.

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL PROCEDURES

Preschool classes begin at 7:45 AM. Preschool classes dismiss at 11:00 (for half day students) and 2:45. Preschool car pool will begin at 2:45.

ABSENCES

It is important for students to attend as much as possible. Skills taught and subjects covered will be built on from day to day. Excessive absenteeism may result in loss of enrollment. If a child will not be in school, parents are asked to call the school prior to 8:00 a.m. to report an absence. The voice mail system may be used to report an absence. Refunds are not provided for missed days. A note of explanation regarding the child's absence should be sent upon returning to school.

In addition, students that are receiving funding through the state's VPK program, must attend at least 85% of the monthly school days. This is referred to as Total Instructional Hours Per Month by the state, and the state will not pay for students that are not in attendance the required necessary days. Students not attending the required 85% could lose their spot and be asked to find another VPK program.

VPK ABSENCES POLICY

The Saint Mary Catholic School Year Program is 540 hours of required instruction. Students must attend a minimum of 432 hours. This means that your student may not miss more than 16 days during the first semester (which ends on December 20, 2023) excused or unexcused. If 17 absences occur before December 20, 2023, Saint Mary Catholic School will require a meeting with parents to consider whether your student will be allowed to continue in the program. Saint Mary Catholic School understands that there are extenuating circumstances (illness, deployment of parent) that might make being absent necessary, but our school wants to encourage regular, consistent attendance of our students to ensure academic success and the greatest educational opportunities. In accordance with VPK requirements, you must turn in documentation regarding absences and verify and sign your "Child Attendance and Parental Choice Certificate" every month.

EXPULSION AND SUSPENSION

Students may be suspended or expelled from preschool for the following reasons:

1. Behavior of the student that presents a moral danger to other students.
2. Behavior that is incorrigible, i.e. the student has been corrected many times, but refuses to change his/her behavior.
3. Frequent absences.

SCHOOL VISITORS

Prior to the beginning of the school year, parents must designate individuals allowed to drop off or pick up their child. An area to provide this information is in the registration packet. Saint Mary Catholic School Preschool cannot dismiss a student to an individual that is not on the pick-up list without the direct permission from the parent. A person picking up a student that is not familiar to the preschool staff may have to show identification to verify they are on the allowed pickup list. Any student transported by bus for any reason must sign a permission form for these services.

EMERGENCY CLOSING

When Okaloosa County Schools are closed due to weather or any type of emergency, Saint Mary School will also close. Please listen to local radio stations for this information. Even if Saint Mary is not specifically mentioned, we will close if the Okaloosa County School System closes.

BIRTHDAYS

Passing out invitations to only a few in the classroom has always been a sensitive issue for many students. Therefore, if you intend to invite your child's entire class to his/her party you may pass out invitations in school. However, if only a few are invited, kindly send the invitations through the mail

CLASS SIZE

Preschool classes are limited to 20 for the Pre-K4 classes and 20 for Pre-K3. The administration reserves the right to make decisions regarding class arrangements.

COMMUNICATION

Periodic administrative announcements are sent to parents by way of the youngest child enrolled in school. This may include: notices of school activities, calendar items or changes, times of dismissal, and other items of interest. Teachers also send home frequent parent communications. These newsletters are also available on-line. All staff members have an active e-mail and classroom website address that is checked daily by all staff members. During the school day, your phone call will be forwarded to the classroom teacher's voice mail as to not interrupt the school climate and teaching atmosphere.

DRESS POLICY

Parents are responsible for what their children wear and we ask cooperation in the following simple guidelines. Students are to wear appropriate school clothing that is neat, clean, and modest. The dress code is also in effect on school days when children participate in field trips away from school. If a child

arrives in questionable attire, the parents will be notified and may be required to pick up their child or bring appropriate clothing. Students may not be admitted to the classroom until appropriately dressed. Spaghetti straps are not allowed. Tops with inappropriate messages printed on them are not to be worn. Appropriate, sensible footwear is encouraged. Due to safety concerns flip-flop type sandals, clogs, and backless shoes are not allowed. Students should wear sneakers and socks.

DRILLS AND EMERGENCY PROCEDURES

Fire and lockdown drills are held periodically throughout the school year. Order and quiet are emphasized during these drills. The fire alarm is set off for fire drills. Five short rings of the dismissal bell signify a tornado drill. A School Lock down Drill will be held periodically. Lock down Procedures is utilized in the event that it is necessary to contain students in a secure location due to a variety of emergencies. The Preschool teacher is always made aware in advance of any drill that may take place. Care is taken not to frighten the children participating in the drills.

INSTRUCTION/CURRICULUM

We implement *Creative Curriculum for Preschool*. *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool* is one of the most widely used pre-K curricula in the nation. It's comprehensive, research-based, research-proven, and it features exploration and discovery as a way of learning.

Foundation volumes help teachers create high-quality learning environments and support deep understanding of early childhood best practices, theories, and research. Robust *Daily Resources* provide the instructional tools and materials to engage children in project-based investigations and make every moment of the day meaningful, intentional, and engaging.

The preschool space is divided into several learning centers. These centers are essential to providing the students the most comprehensive programming.

Gross Motor Center—Through the use of blocks, trucks and other materials the students: Develop large and small muscle control, improve eye-hand coordination, explore spatial relationships and comparisons of size and shape, plan and solve problems while working with other children.

Dramatic Play Center—Through the use of dolls, puppets and pretend kitchen and living room areas the students: Make decisions, imitate people, their work, their feelings, their words and their environment, develop the five senses, increase understanding of the world and where they fit in, use and practice expressive language.

Fine Motor Center—Through the use of puzzles, Legos and other small manipulatives the students: Develop eye-hand coordination and small muscle control, work with a whole object and its parts, see the interrelationship between size and shape.

Activity Center—Through the use of a variety of hands-on projects, the students: Develop eye-hand coordination and small muscle control, learn to use proper pencil and scissors grip, experiment with

form, line, movement, shape and spatial relationships, use creativity to plan, design and implement an idea.

Literacy Center—Through the use of a variety of language arts activities, the students: Learn respect and care for books, identify with imagined events and situations 8, tell and dictate stories, learn to sequence pictures and events in stories, interpret pictures and their details, acquire familiarity with front-back, top-bottom, and left-right progression.

Calendar—Circle Time—Through the use of a calendar and daily routine discussion, the students: Become accustomed to a school routine, learn counting, days of the week, months and seasons of the year, pattern recognition and left to right progression

FOOD ALLERGY POLICY

Saint Mary School recognizes that life threatening food allergies are an important condition affecting many school children and positively welcomes all pupils with food allergies. Information will be kept about students' food allergies in the classroom and in emergency folder, accessible by teachers, substitutes or other responsible adults. All teachers, aides and substitutes will be educated about the risk of food allergies. Tables will be washed with soap and water following any food related events held in the classroom. Sharing or trading food will be prohibited. Proper hand cleaning techniques will be taught and encouraged before and after the handling/consumption of food. In the classroom, and cafeteria a "nut-free" table will be established and maintained as an option for students with peanut allergies.

PHOTOGRAPHS

At times candid photographs of your child(ren) will be taken, as they are involved in various activities. If these photos are not to be used for public relations (i.e. local newspaper, school brochure, school website etc.) please return the photo release to the school no later than two weeks into the first quarter.

FIELD TRIP

Parents must fill out a Field Trip permission form giving their child permission to take part in a field trip. A permission form will be created specifically for each field trip. If bussing is provided a permission form must be signed by the parent to allow for the transportation.

PRAYER

Prayer is a very important aspect in the life of every Christian. Prayer enables us to develop and nurture a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to come to know Christ personally. It enables us to make Jesus an integral part of our daily lives, a true Friend. The students will participate in a variety of prayer experiences. Examples of these experiences include Advent and Lenten prayer services, praying the rosary, Stations of the Cross, May Crowning, etc.

SNACK

Snack will be served daily. Students enrolled in the full-day program will be scheduled on a calendar will provide the snack. Due to several serious allergies, which exist in our school population, we encourage

parents to not send a shared snack that includes nuts: including peanut butter. It is strongly recommended that non-sugared snacks such as fruit, cut vegetables, popcorn, etc. be sent with the children as snacks

FEES AND TUITION

Financial amounts are available on the Saint Mary Catholic School website at saintmaryschool.net under the heading of Admissions/Tuition & Fees. Tuition is charged to meet both current and long-term operating expenses. Tuition and registration fees are non-refundable.

LATE PAYMENT & INSUFFICIENT FUND FEES

If tuition payment is not received within 5 days of the appointed due date, a \$50 late fee will be assessed each month with a late payment. If a check is presented with insufficient funds to cover the amount of the check, a \$50 NSF fee will be assessed as the payment will be considered late.

K3- THREE YEAR OLD PRE KINDERGARTEN

The K3 program is both part-time and full-time. There are three days a week and five days a week options. Students attending the three-year-old prekindergarten program must be toilet trained.

K4 - PRE KINDERGARTEN

Saint Mary Catholic School participates in the Florida Voluntary Prekindergarten program. Children who are 4 before the first (1st) of September are eligible to participate. The state of Florida pays for the student to attend for three hours a day. Saint Mary Catholic School will have two classes of K4 programs from 8:00-11:00 each day. The extended day program will be from 11:00-3:00.

TUITION REFUND POLICY

The school will notify parents at the time of registration that in the event a student withdraws from school prior to the beginning of the school year, there will be no refund of tuition paid up to the amount of two months of the total tuition. If the student withdraws from the school during the school year the following schedule will be non-refundable:

STUDENT WITHDRAWAL NON-REFUNDABLE TUITION

During the first quarter 1/4 of the tuition

During the second quarter 1/2 of the tuition

During the third quarter 3/4 of the tuition

During the fourth quarter 100% of tuition.

In the event of a transfer of employment of the parent over 60 miles from their original home, the principal may use his or her discretion in the refunding of tuition and will notify the Schools Office of the Diocese of Pensacola Tallahassee of his or her decision.

In the event that a student withdraws from the school at any time, there will be no refund of fees paid. This includes book fees, registration fees, graduation fees, retreat fees or other fees established by the school. A Withdrawal Fee of \$150.00 per student will be assessed.

FINANCIAL AID AND TUITION ASSISTANCE

Tuition Assistance is available for students who meet the criteria to determine financial need. Saint

Mary School utilizes the FACTS Grant and Aid Assessment to determine family need for assistance. This application may be accessed at www.factstuitionaid.com by parents. Application may be completed on line.

OFFICE TELEPHONE AND STUDENT CELL PHONES

Students will use the office telephone for emergency purposes only. Items left at home such as books, homework, music instruments, or physical education uniforms/equipment is not considered an emergency. Additionally, phone calls are not allowed to arrange after school activities, these arrangements should be made prior to the beginning of the school day.

HEALTH

Saint Mary School encourages student health and fitness to promote a safe and healthy school environment. All students enrolled in Saint Mary School must have a Florida Physical Examination on file with the school and a Florida Certificate of Immunization for polio, measles, DPT, Hepatitis, mumps, and rubella. Enrollment is not possible unless both are on file. 39 Students complaining of a minor headache or stomachache are allowed to rest in the classroom. Students are not allowed to “rest” in the office. If a student is not well enough to remain in the classroom, the parents are called to pick up the student. Minor scrapes are handled in the classroom. All classrooms have a first aid kit. Parents/guardians are contacted immediately for information and instructions in case of serious illness or accidents. If the parents/guardians are not available, the Emergency Form is consulted for directions. If no responsible person can be reached, and an illness or injury is serious enough to require medical attention, the administrator in charge will arrange for the student to receive appropriate emergency or hospital care. Illness covering five days or more requires an excuse by a doctor. A doctor’s statement permitting the student to return to school is required for any contagious disease. Students should be fever-free without medication for 24 hours before returning to school. Students should be clear for 24 hours of any vomiting or diarrhea before returning to school.

LICE POLICY

Students at Saint Mary School may be checked for head lice by the school office staff. School officials will take the following steps when a student is identified with head lice: (1) Parents or Guardians will be called to transport the student home. Students are not permitted to ride the bus when head lice are identified. (2) School staff will give parents written procedures on the treatment of head lice. (3) After treatment, parents will bring the student back to the clinic with documentation that the head lice were treated and the staff will check that the student is free of lice and/or live nits. (4) Students will be allowed to return to class once the school has been provided with documentation that head lice are being treated and the student has been checked by the office staff. (5) The student will be referred to the school officials upon the third incident of lice or live nits in a single semester. Upon referral, the school officials may refer the student to other available resources.

MEDICATION AND MEDICATION GUIDELINES

No medication of any kind will be dispensed at school, or at a school-sponsored event, without written permission from the parent or guardian.

When a written request is presented by the parent:

1. Medication must be sent to the school in the original safety bottle, clearly marked and identified.
2. Medication must be kept secured in the school office or health room (unless refrigeration is required), and dispensed only from and in the school office or health room by a staff member who has been properly trained, or as authorized by the student's physician.
3. Any administration of medication, prescribed or over-the-counter, must be given at the dosage listed on the container. Any dosage of medication that is different from the listed dosage must be documented with a written notification from a physician.
4. A record of all medication dispensed is maintained in the school office. This record will include the signature of the office/health room personnel.
5. Students are not allowed to have ANY medication (not even aspirin) on their person or in their cubbies, lockers, or book bags.

NOTE: According to Diocesan and County policy, the school will not dispense prescription medication unless the signed authorization to dispense prescription medication form is on file in the school office. These forms are available from the secretary at the office.

VISITORS/VOLUNTEERS

1. All adult visitors coming to the school campus after 8:00 a.m. and before 3:00 p.m. for any reason other than those dealing directly with the office for a scheduled conference or large school activity are expected to sign in at the office and wear an appropriate identification badge.
2. The Guidelines for Volunteer Programs for the Diocese of Pensacola Tallahassee require that volunteers be fingerprinted and attend a child abuse workshop. In order to comply with this guideline and for the safety of our children, all volunteers working at Saint Mary Catholic School must be fingerprinted at the beginning of the school year. This applies to new volunteers.
3. A volunteer cannot divulge confidential information they may have access to in the classroom or school.
4. Volunteers' opinions and judgments regarding children and/or their abilities are to be kept private.
5. Volunteers always work under the guidelines of the supervising faculty or staff member.
6. Volunteers are required to sign in and out in the Volunteer Log Book located in the school office.
7. Volunteers must wear nametags while working in the school. The nametags are located in the school office. All nametags should be returned to the school office when each volunteer shift is over.
8. If a volunteer encounters difficulty working with a certain child or doing a certain task, they should notify the supervising teacher.
9. If there is a problem in the classroom, the situation should be discussed with the teacher in private. It is inappropriate to contradict teachers. If the issue is something a volunteer needs to be discussed with the principal, they should feel free to do so.
10. School-appropriate attire must be worn while volunteering (no workout clothes, short-shorts, etc.)

11. Volunteers will adhere to the same policies regarding eating and drinking on school property as the students. Saint Mary Catholic School is a smoke-free area. No smoking is permitted anywhere on the school grounds.
12. If a volunteer brings a handbag or backpack, it should be placed in a safe, out-of-the-way location. Teachers or supervisors can recommend a preferred place.
13. The Faculty Room is for the use of teachers and staff members only. Volunteers will not use this room.
14. Volunteers will follow all safety rules. Volunteers working in the playground or field areas will be aware of school playground regulations. If an accident occurs, volunteers will contact a teacher or staff member immediately.
15. Volunteers for field trips must have completed the two online “Shield the Vulnerable” Courses and a VECHS background check. Drivers will have completed a volunteer driver form, which must be on file in the school office, indicating that their insurance policy complies with the requirements established by the Diocese.
16. Siblings may not accompany adult volunteers to volunteer assignments unless prior approval is given. Volunteers must be able to give their undivided attention to the supervision of students.

Saint Mary Catholic School Preschool

HANDBOOK ADDENDUM

CONSENT FORM

2025-2026 School Year

After reading the handbook, parents/guardians are to sign in the space provided below, placing the date of the signing in the proper space. This form must be signed and returned by the date indicated below. We as parents/guardians have read the information in this handbook concerning Saint Mary School policies. We (I) agree to have our student(s) under the jurisdiction of these rules.

_____ Parent Signature/Date

_____ Parent Signature/Date

_____ Student Name

Please return this form by August 12, 2025