

**St. Thomas**  
**Early Learning Center**  
**Family Handbook**  
**2010-2011**

*Revised August 2010*

# **St. Thomas Early Learning Center Family Handbook**

## **List of Topics**

Mission Statement  
Episcopal Identity  
History of the School  
Governance of the School  
    Board of Trustees  
    Role of Head of School  
    Relationship of Church and School  
Accreditations, Licensing and Certifications

### **Admissions & Tuition**

Admissions Policy  
Admissions Procedure  
Payment of Tuition  
Tuition Assistance  
Withdrawing a Child from School

### **Communication**

Parent/Teacher Communication  
Concerns and Conflict Resolution  
Conferences  
Official School Communication  
Material from Outside Organizations

### **Arrival**

Parking Lot Drop-Off Procedures  
Tardies  
Late Arrival  
Cell Phone Use

### **Dismissal**

Parking Lot Pick-Up Procedures  
Late Pick-Up  
Carpools & Playdates  
Dismissal to Someone Other Than a Parent or Member of the School Community

### **General information**

Absences  
Accidents at School  
Birthdays

Cell phone use  
Class parties  
Classroom Pets  
Communicable Diseases  
Computer Use Policy  
Custody, Separation and/or Divorce Issues  
Distracting Objects/What to Leave at Home  
Dress Code  
Drugs/Alcohol on Campus  
Field Trips  
Fire Drills  
Food Allergies  
Homework & Makeup Work  
Illnesses  
Immunizations/Vision & Hearing Tests  
Lost and Found  
Lunch  
Medications  
Playground & Meadow  
School Calendar  
Severe Weather  
Snacks  
Student Records  
Visitors  
Weapons on campus

## **Mission Statement**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center is an Episcopal day school serving children age three years through First Grade. The school is an outreach of St. Thomas Episcopal Church and a ministry to our community. As a Christian school, we worship and learn of God in scripture and nature, as well as through our common humanity. We seek to make each year so rich and full that growth and progress are truly appropriate to the age and the individual.

## **Episcopal Identity**

As embodiments of the Christian faith, Episcopal schools are created to be communities that honor, celebrate and worship God as the center of life. They are created as models of God's love and grace. They are created to serve God in Christ in all persons, regardless of origin, background, ability or religion. They are created to "strive for justice and peace among all people and [to] respect the dignity of every human being."

Episcopal schools have been established not solely as communities for Christians but as ecumenical and diverse ministries of educational and human formation for people of all faiths and backgrounds. They are populated by a rich variety of human beings, from increasingly diverse religious, cultural and economic backgrounds. This intentional pluralism of most Episcopal schools is a hallmark of their mission.

Episcopal schools seek to integrate religious and spiritual formation into the overall curriculum and life of the school community. They are clear, yet graceful, about how they articulate and express their basic identities, especially in their religious curricula and traditions.

They invite all who attend and work in them – Episcopalians and non-Episcopalians, Christians and non-Christians, people of no faith tradition – both to seek clarity about their own beliefs and religions and to honor those traditions more fully and faithfully in their own lives.

Episcopal schools exist not merely to educate, but to demonstrate and proclaim the unique worth and beauty of all human beings as creations of a loving, empowering God.

By weaving these principles into the very fabric of school life, Episcopal schools are built on the foundation of a Christian love that guides and challenges all who attend to build lives of genuine meaning, purpose and service in the world they will inherit.

*Adapted from the National Association of Episcopal Schools' "Principle qualities that distinguish a school as Episcopal"*

## **History of the School**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center is a vibrant, loving Episcopal learning community of approximately 17 teachers and staff and 110 students created as an outreach mission of St. Thomas Episcopal Church. *We opened our doors in 1964* with a single Kindergarten class of five students and one teacher. At that time, there was no public school Kindergarten, and the Reverend William Oxley perceived the need for a developmental school where children could learn and experiment in a loving Christian atmosphere free of the fear of corporal

punishment. Over the years, we have added classes to meet the needs of our community while maintaining our belief in respectfully and lovingly addressing the needs of the whole child and meeting children where they are in any given moment. *Forty six years later*, the Early Learning Center continues to lovingly care for children and their families by offering three Beginners classes, three pre-Kindergarten classes, two Kindergarten classes and a First Grade.

## **Governance of the School**

### **Board of Trustees**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center is governed by a nine-member Board of Trustees appointed and charged by the St. Thomas Episcopal Church Vestry (the governing body of the parish). The Board develops the overall policies of the school, safeguards the integrity of the school, and provides the Head of School with advice, direction and support as needed. The Board acts as final arbitrator in the due process proceedings of students and staff. The Rector of St. Thomas Church and the Head of School are both ex-officio members. One member of the Church Vestry serves as a liaison between the Board and the Church Vestry. Trustees serve three-year terms and can serve two consecutive terms.

### **Role of the Head of School**

The Head of School is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. She hires, supervises, and, if need be, dismisses all staff members; manages the property and finances; and leads the teachers in developing curriculum. The Head of School consults with the President of the Board on all sensitive matters, takes counsel with the Executive Committee when appropriate, and keeps the Board informed on all matters requiring their attention

### **Relationship of the school to St. Thomas Episcopal Church**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center, like all Episcopal schools, was established by the parish to advance the educational ministry of the Episcopal Church. Everything about the school, from worship to religious teaching to curriculum, co-curricular activities and administration, must accord with the mission of the Church and be subject to the Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Diocese of Texas and its Bishop.

## **Accreditations, Licensing and Certifications**

- St. Thomas Early Learning Center is accredited by the **National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)** and is *the only NAEYC accredited school in Bryan/College Station*. NAEYC administers the largest and most widely recognized national, voluntary, professionally sponsored accreditation system for all types of early childhood school and childcare centers, and the nation's largest organization of early childhood educators.

- In 2009, the ELC received accreditation from the **Southern Association of Episcopal Schools (SAES)**, an accrediting organization approved by the Texas Private School Accreditation Commission and *recognized by the Texas Education Agency* and the Commissioner of Education.
- In 2010, St. Thomas Early Learning Center became *only the second school in Texas and the 39<sup>th</sup> in the entire United States* to receive the **National Arbor Day Foundation's** certification as a **Nature Explore Classroom**. The playground at the Early Learning Center creates spaces that give children the opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural world. Using the school grounds and the Meadow and Pond area teachers and staff provide intentional experiences that promote discovery and contemplation of nature. The ELC has also been recognized by the **National Wildlife Federation** for its **Schoolyard Habitat**.
- St. Thomas Early Learning Center is licensed by the **Texas Department of Family & Protective Services**.
- All St. Thomas Early Learning Center staff members and regular volunteers have been certified in the Episcopal Church's sexual abuse prevention program, **Safeguarding God's Children**.

## **ADMISSIONS & TUITION**

### **Admissions policy**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center considers all applicants equally and fairly, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, religion or national origin. A child must be three years of age *by September 1<sup>st</sup>* to be enrolled in a Beginners class, four years of age to be enrolled in a Pre-kindergarten class, five years of age to be enrolled in Kindergarten, and six years of age to be enrolled in First Grade.

### **Admissions procedure**

The number of applications St. Thomas Early Learning Center can accept is limited by class size. Please call the school office to place your child's name on a class waiting list. It is important that you get your name on a waiting list as early as possible because our classes fill quickly and the date you were put on the list, or date of inquiry, is considered when filling class openings.

In late fall, pre-enrollment forms for the following year are sent out to all families currently enrolled at the school and all families on our waiting list. Once the pre-enrollment forms have been returned, children currently enrolled at the Early Learning Center are considered first; children of active members of St. Thomas Episcopal Church are considered second; children with siblings currently enrolled at the ELC are considered third; children of former families of the ELC are considered fourth by date of inquiry. All other children are then considered by date of inquiry.

Letters of acceptance are sent out in late winter/early spring. Registration packets are sent out the end of May. *Registration forms, signed contracts, and non-refundable registration fees must be returned to the school office by the date specified to complete your child's registration* and acceptance to the Early Learning Center. After the registration deadline has passed, any openings are filled from the waiting lists by date of inquiry.

### **Payment of tuition**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center provides three ways to pay tuition:

- Payable in full to the school office on September 1<sup>st</sup>. No additional fees.
- Monthly or twice yearly payment options via automatic bank draft available through FACTS, a tuition payment management program used by schools across the country. This option requires a small enrollment fee payable to FACTS.
- Monthly or twice yearly payment options via invoice to your home and payable to FACTS. This option requires a small enrollment fee payable to FACTS.

For more information, you may access the FACTS website through the e-cashier link on the school's website at [stthomaselc.org](http://stthomaselc.org).

### **Tuition assistance**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center offers a limited amount of tuition assistance based on need. Assistance is available on a one-year basis with no guarantee for the following year. Applications are available from the school office and must be submitted with your child's registration papers accompanied by a letter stating need. The ELC Board's Finance Committee reviews applications and grants requests.

### **Withdrawing a child from school**

If for any reason you withdraw your child from St. Thomas Early Learning Center once a school contract has been signed, a letter of notification must be sent to the Head of School one month prior to withdrawal. **Because the school's yearly budget is based on the school's enrollment for that year, you are obligated to continue paying tuition until your vacancy is filled, even if your child no longer attends the Early Learning Center.** Vacancies will be filled from waiting lists at the discretion of the Head of School and the Board of Trustees.

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Parent/Teacher Communication**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center believes open communication between home and school contributes to a child's success at and enjoyment of school. Your child's teacher will keep you informed of general happenings in the classroom and calendars/schedules through

notes at the classroom door, email, postings on the school website and/or letters sent home with the children.

If a teacher feels an incident or behavior needs attention, she will email or call you, or speak with you personally at the end of the school day. Likewise, parents are encouraged to keep teachers informed of significant events at home because they can affect a child's behavior at school. Together, with the insight you both bring concerning your child, you can brainstorm solutions and develop a plan for addressing the concern.

The teacher's main duty in the morning is greeting her students and starting their day with her attention on them. A short note given to her in the morning is an effective way to communicate. She will call if she needs more information, or you can speak in more detail after school.

### **Concerns and Conflict Resolution**

The "chain of command" for concerns and problem solving begins with the teacher. If you feel the problem hasn't been resolved or the lines of communication aren't open, then consult with the Head of School. If you still have not received a satisfactory response, you may appeal to the Executive Committee of the Board.

### **Conferences**

Formal parent/teacher conferences are held twice a year. In December or January, your child's teacher will schedule conferences or hold a more informal conference over the phone to address any concerns either of you may be having. An end-of-year conference, with an overview of your child's progress the past year, takes place the week after school is out.

### **Official School Communication**

School-wide communication, such as notes from the Head of School or fundraising information, will be done via mail, email, postings on the school website at [sthomaselc.org](http://sthomaselc.org), or occasional notes or flyers sent home with your child. Please make sure the office has a current primary email address for your family.

### **Material from Outside Organizations**

Material from outside organizations, such as scout troops or fundraising or business organizations, may not be distributed through the Early Learning Center.

### **ARRIVAL PROCEDURES**

Morning drop-off for *Beginner* and *Pre-Kindergarten* classes is from 8:30 to 8:45am. Drop-off for the afternoon *Pre-Kindergarten* class is from 12:30 to 12:45pm. *Kindergarten* and *First Grade* classes begin ***promptly*** at 8:30am. Please do not bring your child any earlier, as teachers count on their time before class to prepare for the day.

## **Parking Lot Drop Off**

You may drop your child off at the curb in front of their classroom or you may park your car in the parking lot and walk your child into class. To ensure the safety of our children please follow these guidelines:

- Cell phones are proven to create distracted drivers. **Do not use your phone when driving in the school parking lot.**
- Drive slowly and watch for children and bicycles.
- Drive into the parking lot using the far right entrance closest to the playground and Silvey House. Exit using the middle lane.
- Pull up as tight as possible to the car in front of you.
- All edges and curbs are used as drop-off lanes and must be kept clear. **Do not park and get out of your car at the curb.**
- If you need to get out of your car to escort your child to his or her classroom, park in the spaces in the center of the parking lot.
- Cars may **not** be left unattended in the drop-off lanes and **never** left running if the driver is not in the car.

## **Tardies**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center doesn't formally keep track of late arrivals. Though we understand that it can be difficult getting young children out the door, keep in mind that arriving at school is a crucial time for a young child because it can set the tone for their entire day. Many need a few moments to make the transition between home and school and that can be hard to do with a classroom already in motion.

## **Late Arrival**

If you arrive after 8:45am (or 12:30pm for the afternoon class), please walk your child to his or her classroom door to ensure the class is present in the room as they may have gone to Chapel or Music. If the class is not present, please escort your child to where they need to be and confirm with a teacher you are dropping them off. Children may not be left unattended in the classroom.

## **Cell Phone Use**

Cell phones take away from your ability to be fully present in the moment you are in with the people you are with. Please do not text or talk on your phones when dropping off your child at school. Saying goodbye to your children is a part of the day that deserves your full attention.

## **DISMISSAL PROCEDURES**

When school is over, teachers escort their children to their designated pick-up benches where you may pick them up in the car line or park and walk up to greet them. Dismissal for *Beginner* and *Pre-Kindergarten* classes is at 11:30am. Dismissal for *Half-day Kindergarten* is at 11:45am. Dismissal for *Full-day Kindergarten, First Grade* and *Lunch Bunch* is at 2:30pm. Children attending Lunch Bunch will be escorted to the Lunch Bunch room.

### **Parking Lot Pick-Up**

You may pick up your child in the car line or you may park your car in the parking lot and walk to the benches. To ensure the safety of our children please follow these guidelines:

- Cell phones are proven to create distracted drivers. **Do not use your phone when driving in the school parking lot.**
- Drive slowly and watch for children and bicycles.
- Drive into the parking lot using the far right entrance closest to the playground and Silvey House. Exit using the middle lane.
- Pull up as tight as possible to the car in front of you.
- All edges and curbs are used as pick up lanes and must be kept clear. **Do not park and get out of your car at the curb.**
- If you need to get out of your car, park in the spaces in the center of the parking lot.
- Cars may **not** be left unattended in the pick-up lanes and **never** left running if the driver is not in the car.

### **Late Pick-Up**

If you are more than 15 minutes late, efforts will be made to reach you and your child will be supervised in the Lunch Bunch room or the school office until you arrive. If you know you will be late, please contact the school office.

### **Carpools & Playdates**

Regular carpool drivers need to be designated on your enrollment form in the area for persons authorized to pick my child up from school. If your child is going home with a friend for a playdate, please send in a note specifying the arrangement.

### **Dismissal to Someone Other Than a Parent or Member of the School Community**

If the person picking up your child from school is someone whom your child's teacher is not familiar with, please send in a note specifying the arrangement. He or she will be asked to leave a copy of their driver's license in the school office.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

### **Absences**

While St. Thomas Early Learning Center does not have a formal attendance policy, we strongly encourage consistent attendance at school for fostering a child's sense of belonging and bonding with their peers. Please keep your child's teacher informed of possible absences, late arrivals or early dismissals. If your child is ill, please contact the school office by phone or email.

### **Accidents at School**

All classrooms contain First Aid kits. Minor scrapes and bruises will be treated at school, and parents will be notified at pick-up time. Depending upon the nature of the injury, an accident form may be filled out and signed by the parent. If the child seems particularly upset, parents will be notified. If an accident requires more attention than the school can provide, 911 will be called. In the event that a parent cannot be contacted, the school will follow the emergency directions in the student's school file. All children attending the Early Learning Center are covered by a general accident insurance policy during school hours.

### **Birthdays**

We love to celebrate birthdays at school during snack time. Please discuss specific arrangements with your teacher but you can follow these general guidelines:

- St. Thomas Early Learning Center tries to provide a balanced, nutritious snack for the children. Please try to do the same with birthday snacks.
- We often have children with food allergies. Please discuss any restrictions with your teacher.
- Keep it simple! Please do not bring balloons and goody bags; they will not be distributed. Snacks, drinks, plates and napkins are all that are necessary.
- First graders celebrate birthdays with special hot lunches that are scheduled with the teacher.
- Summer birthdays are celebrated in the spring.
- **Birthday party invitations cannot be handed out at school** due to the complications that can arise from lost invitations or someone not being invited. Please mail birthday invitations or distribute outside school.

### **Cell Phone Use**

Cell phones take away from your ability to be fully present in the moment you are in with the people you are with. Please do not text or talk on your phones when dropping off and picking up your child from school. Saying goodbye to your children and greeting them upon your return are parts of the day that deserve your full attention.

When volunteering in the classroom or on the playground, your full attention should be on the children. Cell phone use is for emergencies only.

Our parking lot is a very busy place and cell phones are proven to create distracted drivers. Do not use your phone when in the school parking lot.

### **Class Parties**

Classroom parties, organized by parents, are held during the year to celebrate holidays and other special occasions. Consult your classroom teacher regarding appropriate activities and food. Keep in mind, that simple is often better for young children during busy holiday times. Siblings should stay at home so your full attention can be given to the children in the classroom.

### **Classroom Pets**

Many of the classrooms have pets for the children to enjoy. The animals are kept in cages and cared for by the teachers and students, giving the children the opportunity to observe the animals and learn the responsibility of having a pet. If your child has any pet allergies, please let your teacher know and appropriate action will be taken.

### **Communicable Diseases**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center will notify parents if children have been exposed to a communicable disease following the guidelines provided by the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services and the Brazos County Health Department.

### **Computer Use Policy**

Computers are found in Kindergarten and First Grade classrooms. Kindergarten computers are used for playing educational games; first grade computers are used for educational games and typing reports for special projects. Students are not allowed to access the Internet.

### **Custody, Separation, and/or Divorce Issues**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center recognizes that families can be thrown into crisis as a result of separation or divorce. Teachers and staff will respond with compassion and discretion, and work to maintain a safe, loving and consistent environment for your child at school. Each case is unique, so the specifics of each family's situation should be discussed with the classroom teacher and the Head of School.

### **Distracting Objects/What to Leave at Home**

Bringing toys and unessential items to school is not allowed. Many classes incorporate sharing times into their day. Please follow your teacher's guidelines regarding acceptable sharing items. No toy guns, knives or other war toys are allowed at school. Weapons, drugs and alcohol are not allowed. Electronic devices of any kind are not allowed.

## **Dress Code**

Children are very active and often very messy! Their exploration and play will not be curtailed to keep clothing from getting dirty. Please send your child to school in clothes that will allow them to freely participate in all school activities without the worry of ruining an item. Smocks are offered but not all washable paint is actually washable, and sometimes nonwashable art supplies are used. Water and sand are common fixtures on the playground. Beginner and Pre-Kindergarten children should always have a spare change of clothes in their classroom cubbies. Tennis shoes or other closed toe shoe (no slick soles) make the best footwear. Strap on sandals are okay but flip flops need to stay at home. First graders must wear tennis shoes on PE days.

## **Drugs and Alcohol on Campus**

Drugs and alcohol are not allowed on campus during school hours or at school functions.

## **Field Trips**

Kindergarten and First Grade take many field trips throughout the year. At the beginning of the year, parents are asked to sign up to help drive and chaperone these trips. The following guidelines are followed:

- Field trips are a time of heightened excitement and require additional supervision. Please leave younger siblings at home so that you may keep your full attention on the Early Learning Center students.
- Drivers must have a copy of their driver's license and proof of insurance on file in the school office before departing from the school.
- All vehicles used for field trips carry a fire extinguisher and first aid kit, available from the school office and given to you by your child's teacher.
- All children must be single-belted and in booster seats if applicable.
- A notice will be posted outside the classroom to remind parents when a field trip is taking place.
- Teachers will often ask the children to wear a St. Thomas t-shirts on field trip days.

## **Fire Drills**

As required by state law, school buildings are inspected annually by the Fire Marshal. Regular fire drills are conducted and evacuation routes are posted in all classrooms.

## **Food Allergies**

Please discuss any allergies your child may have with his or her teacher so an appropriate plan may be put into place. All efforts will be made to remove any known allergens from snacks distributed at school. If EPI-pens or other medication are required in the case of accidental exposure, please talk to your child's teacher.

### **Homework and Makeup work**

Homework expectations for Kindergarten and First Grade students will be made clear to students and parents during the early days of school and orientation. Please coordinate with your child's teacher the makeup of any work due to absences.

### **Illnesses**

Please notify the school office when your child misses school due to illness. *Students must be symptom-free and fever-free for twenty-four hours before returning to school after an illness.* If a child becomes ill at school, he or she will be taken to the school office and a parent notified to pick them up. If a child is hospitalized, please let their teacher know so arrangements can be made for visits and get well messages.

### **Immunization and Vision and Hearing Test Records**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center must have current immunization and vision and hearing test records on file in the school office. These forms are sent out in the school registration packets and are to be *completely* filled out and returned by the first day of school.

### **Lost and found**

Lost and found items are placed in a box in the teacher workroom upstairs in the Silvy House. Items of significant value are kept in the office. Periodically, unclaimed items will be donated to charity.

### **Lunch**

First graders and children enrolled in Lunch Bunch bring their own lunches from home each day. Please send nutritious lunches that will meet your child's daily food needs. Milk will be provided for those who would like it. Children must eat only what they have brought from home and may not share their food with others. Please label all lunch boxes and containers with your child's name. Due to Health Department restrictions, we are unable to heat any food in the microwave.

### **Medications**

If a child needs medication administered during school hours, it must left in the original container, accompanied by a letter with instructions signed and dated by the parent. A record will be kept in the classroom noting times and dates when medication is given. The school reserves the right to require parents to administer their children's medications. Children are not allowed to administer their own medication while at school.

If the medication is one that has to be administered immediately for an allergic reaction (e.g. an EPIpen or Benadryl), then the medicine, with instructions for administering, is kept with your child's classroom first aid box. A notice explaining your child's allergy and instructions in the event of exposure will be posted in the classroom.

### **Playground & Meadow**

During school hours, the playground & meadow are reserved for the use of the children attending school. Children using the playground before and after school must be supervised by a parent.

### **School Calendar**

St. Thomas Early Learning Center follows the College Station Independent School District calendar with the exception of the first and last days of school.

### **Severe Weather**

In the case of severe weather, please check the school website at [sthomaselc.org](http://sthomaselc.org) and/or stay tuned to local media outlets for announcements of school closures or delays. If College Station ISD is closed or delayed, the Early Learning Center will also be closed or delayed.

If severe weather occurs during the school day, every precaution will be made to keep your child safe. Each class at St. Thomas Early Learning Center practices what to do in case of a tornado at least once per year and children are not allowed outside when lightning is present in the area.

### **Snacks**

Nutritious snacks with water and juice are provided each day. Please talk to your child's teacher regarding any food allergies or sensitivities. Teachers welcome children bringing special snacks for their classmates from home; please consult with your classroom teacher regarding allergies.

### **Student Records**

Student records are kept in a secure file cabinet to safeguard each child's privacy. When a student leaves the Early Learning Center, these records are retained in an inactive file. Evaluations and records of academic performance are forwarded upon request.

### **Visitors**

All visitors must check-in with the office upon arrival at the school. Parents may visit the school at any time and are encouraged to come observe once per semester.

### **Weapons on campus**

Weapons of any kind are not allowed on campus.

Extra copies of this handbook and copies of the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services Minimum Standard Rules are available in the school office. Please contact the Head of School if you have questions about our policies and procedures. A notice of any changes made to this handbook during the school year will be sent home with your child.