

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington Catholic Schools

Guiding Principles for Early Childhood Programs



Catholic Schools
A Faith-Based Education
that Lasts a Lifetime

Early childhood programs in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington (RCADW) provide developmental, educational, and spiritual guidance to children in the RCADW who fall in the age range of birth to age five. Early childhood programs take place either at an early learning center (ELC) or in an elementary school (school-based early learning program).

- **Early Learning Center**-an early childhood program that is located in and operated by a RCADW parish. While there may be a school at the parish, generally speaking, the ELC is separate from the school. ELC's provide childcare for children starting at birth through five years old (age to attend kindergarten).
- **School Based Early Learning Programs**- a pre-kindergarten program located in and operated by an RCADW elementary school. School-based programs provide early educational programming for children as young as two years old.

These guiding principles were developed in conjunction with members of the Early Childhood Advisory Committee. The principles below are specific to our early childhood programs. In some areas they align with our *Policies for Catholic Schools*. These principals align with the standards for Maryland EXCELS, Maryland Accreditation, the Maryland State Department of Education Office of Child Care licensing requirements listed in the Commonwealth of Maryland Regulations ([CMOR-Child Care](#) or [CMOR-Letters of Compliance](#)).

Although our early childhood programs in the District of Columbia are exempt from licensure, it is recommended they follow these guiding principles when applicable.

Curriculum (Policy 3210)- Programs should use a curriculum approved by the Maryland State Department of Education and the Catholic Schools Office. The curriculum should be aligned with the [RCADW Pre-K Standards](#), as well as the [Maryland Early Learning Standards](#).

- A [MSDE approved curriculum](#) is one of the following:
 - A curriculum in use by the Local Education Agency for prekindergarten;
 - [A Children Discovering Their World curriculum](#);
 - A published curriculum;
 - An individually developed curriculum; or
 - A Curriculum of Historic Significance recognized by MSDE.
 - High Scope
 - Montessori
 - Waldorf
- Lesson plans include culturally competent, age-appropriate, domain-based activities reflective of children's interests and skills;
 - address the developmental needs of each and every child;
 - are informed by ongoing assessments, observations, and information gained from families about their children; and
 - include information from an IFSP/IEP, if provided.

**Policies listed in this document can be found in the Policies for Catholic Schools*

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Assessments (Policy 3310)-Assessments in the early childhood programs are ongoing and frame the instruction in the classrooms. All children from birth through the age of five years old are evaluated.

- Developmental screening within 90 days of enrollment and at scheduled times throughout the school year.
- Assessments align with curriculum
- Observations are conducted by teachers on an ongoing basis
- Multiple assessment methods are used
- Written Assessment Plan

Program Evaluation- early childhood programs regularly evaluate the overall program and use the results to plan program improvement. Program evaluation:

- is completed annually
- staff and families play an active role in developing evaluation
- evaluation can be done via Google forms, Cognito, Survey Monkey or any other tool
- results shared with staff, families, and other stakeholders.

Early Childhood Staff Qualifications- Staff must meet or exceed the Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care licensing requirements (CMOR). All Early Childhood teaching staff (teachers and assistants) should obtain MD Child Care Credential Certificates. Teachers should obtain and maintain an MD Child Care Certificate of a level four or higher within two years of hire. Assistants should obtain and maintain an MD Child Care Certificate of a level three or higher within two years of hire.

Behavior Guidance Policies- Staff of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington Early Learning Programs use positive behavioral supports and strategies with children that include:

- providing choices;
- using redirection, reflection, and problem solving;
- clear rules and expectations developed with input from the children

Technology Policy (Policy 3212)-Technology is used to support the learning environment. The use of technology is appropriate and interactive. Teachers use various mediums of technology in an equitable manner to enhance, not replace, interactions in the learning classroom.

- *Screen Time* – If used, television, computers or other media devices are used only when directly related to facilitate learning experiences. No screen time is permitted for children under the age of two years old.

Including All Children- Our early learning programs welcome all children, including those with special developmental or health care needs. If a child has special needs, please ask families to share their IEP, IFSP or other documentation that will help us to plan for the child's full participation in all activities. The team will determine the type of support that can be offered.

Licensing-All early childhood programs must hold a childcare center license or a letter of compliance from MSDE OCC.

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Transition Plans- Early childhood programs have written policies that address when children transition from:

- *Home to program*-when students are new to your program. This policy may include checklists, assessments, and communication that families can expect.
- *Within the program*-when students move from one classroom to another in the program. This policy includes that parents are notified prior to classroom change, the developmental readiness of the child supports the transition, and the time frame of transition.
- *Program to program*-when students move from your program to another program (elc, ADW school-based program, community-based program, local public, or private school). This policy may include written permission from the parent to communicate with the new program, and how to transfer health records. etc.

These plans promote a continuity of learning and support for our children and their families as they move from one learning environment to another.

Handbooks-each program has a staff handbook and a family handbook. The program keeps a written receipt of each. For school-based programs, components not covered in your handbooks can be in the form of an addendum to your school handbook.

- *Staff handbooks must include*
 - a mission and/or philosophy statement;
 - daily schedules
 - policies and procedures related to:
 - health and safety;
 - child development;
 - inclusion of children with disabilities and special health care needs;
 - training;
 - positive behavior practices; and
 - staff roles, responsibilities,
 - benefits
 - performance evaluation
- *Family handbook must include*
 - a mission and/or philosophy statement;
 - daily schedules
 - policies and practices for:
 - health and safety;
 - positive behavior practices;
 - tuition/enrollment;
 - inclusion of children with disabilities or special health care needs;
 - communicating with families;
 - chain of command, grievance/problem solving process
 - physical fitness;
 - nutrition;
 - curriculum and child assessment.
 - family engagement opportunities
 - Bi-annual conferences
 - Statement describing selection and use of learning materials

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