



Early Childhood Parent Handbook

Our Mission

We educate the individual child within our Catholic faith by providing excellent academic experiences and dynamic faith formation.

Contact Information

Phone: 515-277-0178

www.sainttheresaiowa.org/school

Dear St. Theresa Families,

St. Theresa Catholic School has been a place where faith meets academic excellence to excel student growth and development as successful disciples of Christ. Our patron saint, St. Therese of Lisieux, guides our work through her life and recorded examples of her faith, her writings and her prayers.

As we enter the new school year, our staff old and new are dedicated to providing the very best for each child. We will challenge and support each child, meeting them where their needs are. We will encourage them to live each moment with Christ at the center of their lives, while using their God given talents. We will provide a rigorous learning atmosphere where students are engaged through inquiry learning in a safe place.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve your family! I am honored to serve as Principal for your students and the St. Theresa Community. I encourage you to contact me with any questions, comments, suggestions or concerns.

**Blessings,
Gretchen Watznauer,
Principal
gwatznauer@stsdsm.com
515-277-1078**

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Our Curriculum and Assessment

Our Early Childhood curriculum is literacy-based and is designed to provide young children with many ways of playing and interacting with others and the learning environment. Teachers use the Frog Street Pre-K curriculum, Really Great Reading literacy curriculum, Leader in Me character building curriculum, and Conscious Discipline social emotional curriculum, as well as additional research-based strategies to help us meet the needs of our diverse population. The State of Iowa has developed Early Learning Standards that provide the foundation for our programs. By following the Standards listed below, we are ensuring that all children receive a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate experience that prepares them for kindergarten. Teachers assess the progress of each child using a variety of tools. Teachers use screening tools to identify a student's interests as well as their needs. Teaching Strategies Gold is used to monitor children's progress, and the information gathered assists with planning instruction. Student portfolios are also created to show progress over time. Parents receive information about their child's progress during home visits, conferences and as needed throughout the school year.

Iowa Early Learning Standards

- Physical Well-Being and Motor Development
 - Healthy and Safe Living
 - Large Motor Development
 - Fine Motor Development
- Approaches to Learning
 - Curiosity and Initiative
 - Engagement and Persistence
 - Reasoning and Problem Solving
 - Play and Senses
- Social and Emotional Development
 - Self
 - Self-Regulation
 - Relationships with Adults
 - Relationships with Children
- Communication, Language, and Literacy
 - Language Understanding and Use
 - Early Literacy
 - Early Writing
- Math
 - Comparison, Numbers, and Operations
 - Patterns
 - Shapes and Spatial Relationships
 - Measurement
 - Data analysis
- Science
 - Scientific Reasoning
 - Scientific Investigation
 - Scientific Communication
- Creative Arts
 - Art
 - Music, Rhythm, and Movement
 - Dramatic Play
- Social Studies
 - Awareness of family and community
 - Awareness of culture
 - Awareness of the relationship between people and the environment in which they live

- o Awareness of the past

Statement of Non-Discrimination

It shall be the policy of the Diocese of Des Moines Catholic Schools Board that all schools consider individuals for a position for which they meet the requirements no matter their age, color, creed, national origin, race, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical attributes, physical or mental ability or disability, ancestry, political party preference, political belief, socioeconomic status, or familial status be considered for a position for which they meet the requirements as such may apply to religious schools. (281-IAC 12.1(1) Nothing in Iowa Code and this policy shall be construed as prohibiting any bona fide religious institution from imposing qualifications based upon religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity when such qualifications are related to a bona fide religious purpose. In addition, schools shall comply with the anti-bullying/anti-harassment laws of the state of Iowa, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act as such may apply to diocesan schools. All schools must include this non-discrimination policy in the faculty/staff handbooks.

GENERAL POLICIES AND GUIDELINES



Attendance

Good attendance is important for school success. Your child should attend school every day, except when they are ill. It is also important for students to arrive on time each day for the following reasons:

- Children learn the routine and feel comfortable when they know what to expect daily.
- Children begin and end the day as a group. It is important to begin and end the day on a positive note.
- The teacher plans each part of your child's day. If your child is frequently tardy they will miss important learning opportunities.
- Children begin to develop good habits and a positive attitude about school attendance.

Parents must contact the school to report when their child will be absent. Call the school office

515-277-0178 and/or email Jennifer Jorgensen (jjorgensen@stsdsm.com)

- If your child is absent and staff does not hear before 8am, you will be contacted to determine the cause of the absence.
- If your child has a record of unexplained or frequent absences, your child may no longer be able to participate in the program. If your child is repeatedly tardy, leaves early or is left at the center after the program day (morning or afternoon) your child may no longer be able to participate in the program.



Statement of Non-Discrimination

St. Theresa Catholic School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, disability, religion, creed, age (for employment), marital status (for programs), sexual orientation, gender identity and socioeconomic status (for programs) in its educational programs and its employment practices.



Pick Up Policy

Children will only be released to an authorized adult as determined by the guardian. Authorization must be given on the Emergency and Pick-Up Permission form by the parent or legal guardian. The names and telephone numbers of adults authorized to pick up your child must appear on this form. **Families should provide as many emergency contacts as possible for emergencies. Please keep these numbers updated if your phone number changes or is disconnected.**



School Cancellation/Closing

St. Theresa PreK follows the School Calendar. The calendar can be found on the school website www.sainttheresaiowa.org/school, and monthly calendars will be sent home as well as upcoming dates in the weekly newsletter.

If St. Theresa is closed due to bad weather, Early Childhood programs will be closed too. Please check local television, radio or the St. Theresa website for information on school closings. St. Theresa also uses JMC and will send out communication when there are cancellations or delays.



Toys from Home

Please do not send toys to school. Everything that children need for a successful early childhood experience is provided. St. Theresa has **a zero tolerance policy** regarding guns, knives and other weapons, including toy weapons.

HEALTH



Accident or Illness

- Parents will be contacted immediately in case of serious illness or accident. Preschool staff provides written incident reports to parents when there are minor injuries, minor changes in health status, or behavioral concerns. Accident reports will be completed at the discretion of the school nurse for injuries that require medical attention.
- Please notify the classroom if your emergency contact numbers change, so we can contact you in case of illness or emergency.
- Parents who are working or going to school are encouraged to have a “back-up” plan for a sick child.
- Everyone must wash their hands when entering the classroom.



Cleaning and Sanitation Practices

To ensure the classroom is properly cleaned and sanitized, all classrooms use the Monthly Cleaning and Sanitizing Frequency Table. Staff will complete each item on the Monthly Cleaning Checklist; initialing and dating as completed daily. To promote indoor air quality, aerosol, spray or other air fresheners, sanitizers or perfumes cannot be used in child occupied/used areas. Chemical air fresheners and sanitizers may cause nausea and an allergic response in some children. Odors should be controlled by ventilation and appropriate cleaning and disinfection. St. Theresa is a fragrance/scent safe environment.



Communicable Disease Policy

Please keep your child home if they have any of the following symptoms

Symptom or disease:	Child may not attend class until:
Diarrhea	Free of diarrhea for 24 hours
Fever – 100.4 degrees by mouth	Fever-free for 24 hours without the use of fever reducing medicine
Impetigo	24 hours after treatment is started
Pink eye	Note from doctor
Rash with fever	Note from doctor
Ring worm	24 hours after treatment is started, cover

- You will be contacted and asked to pick up your child if he or she becomes ill at school.
- Please notify the classroom if your child has a communicable disease
- The classroom will post notices of exposure of children to a communicable disease.

Please keep your child at home if he or she has an illness that is contagious OR:

- Prevents them from being comfortable at school (for example-ear infection or continuous coughing).
- Your child needs more care than the staff can provide without affecting the health and safety of other children.



Head Lice

If your child has head lice, you may be asked to pick your child up from school and begin to treat the lice. The school nurse can provide additional information upon request.



Medication Policy

Families are encouraged to give medication at home where children are under the supervision of a parent/guardian. Occasionally, children will need to take medication at school or have medication available for an emergency. St. Theresa's medication policy is as follows:

- Only nurses or other trained district staff will give medicine to a child at school
- The parent or guardian must sign the Request For Giving Medicine At School form which can be found at www.sainttheresaiowa.org/school
- The parent must personally deliver medicine in its original pharmacy container to the teacher or school nurse.
- No over-the-counter medications will be given without a doctor's order.



Nutrition

Nutritious meals or snacks are served to all children. Children will be served only food prepared by a school employee. All food served meets the nutritional requirements of the Federal school lunch program.

Parents are not to bring or send any food to the classroom. This includes edible birthday treats such as cake, cookies, candy, etc. Parents are encouraged to bring in a special book to share and read to the class or other nonfood related treats.

- Let us know if your child has any food allergies or religious food preferences. If your child has a food allergy, fill out the health page on JMC AND notify your child's teacher so they can make alternative arrangements if needed.
- We encourage children's independence and decision-making by allowing them to choose the foods and the amount they want to eat. "Clean plates" are not emphasized. Food is **never** used as a reward or punishment. Mealtimes are opportunities for children to practice their communication and social skills.



Physical, Dental, Immunization Forms & Screenings

Physical Examination, Dental Examination and Immunization

- Children are required to have a current physical and valid certificate of immunization on file at all times. Physicals are due within 30 days of enrollment.
- A dental examination is required within 90 days of enrollment.
- If your child does not have a doctor or dentist, a list of providers can be provided upon request.

Screenings

- Screenings provide important information about your child's health. Each child will have a vision, hearing, and developmental screening at school. Growth, dental, and speech screenings will be provided as needed. If you do not want your child to participate, please notify the school nurse in writing.



Toilet Training

- Children who are not potty trained can attend preschool. The goal of our toilet training policy is to promote developmentally appropriate self-help skills and independence.
- If your child is not toilet trained, teachers will ask for your help in developing a toilet training plan for your child that is appropriate to his/her needs. This plan will include full involvement from you as the parent/guardian.
- Expectations for families may include frequent toileting of the child while at home, establishing a consistent routine, providing extra clothing/diapers/pull-ups/wipes for use at school if needed. Pull Ups are preferred to help encourage the child's independence.
- All families are encouraged to keep a change of clothing for their child at school, in case of toileting accidents, or spills.
- Please contact the school nurse for more information or to see the complete Toilet Training Policy.

SAFETY



Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

All classroom teachers are mandatory reporters as required by local and state laws.

If you suspect a child under the age of 18 is being abused or neglected please call:

- **The Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-362-2178** (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week). Please be ready to provide identifying information and the whereabouts of the child. You may remain anonymous unless you are making a report as a mandatory reporter. If you are making a report as a mandatory reporter, you must leave your name and contact information.

If you believe the child is in imminent danger, **CALL 911 immediately.**



Clothing Suggestions

Please dress your child in clothing appropriate for play. Tennis shoes or other shoes with rubber soles should be worn.

For safety reasons:

- Avoid flip-flops and other loose fitting shoes.
- Avoid or remove drawstrings on jackets and coats.
- Avoid having students wear jewelry (necklaces, long dangly earrings) they may be lost, broken or present a danger while playing.

We go outside every day, weather permitting. When the weather is cold, please dress your child warmly in hat, coat, gloves and long pants. In warm weather, please apply sunscreen at home. If you need assistance obtaining appropriate clothing for your child, talk to your classroom staff.



Discipline and Guidance

At St. Theresa Catholic School, our overall goal is to prepare children for kindergarten. To support this goal, we provide our students guidance and practice in developing social skills. Early Childhood teachers use the Conscious Discipline and Leader in Me curriculums to teach developmentally appropriate social skills. When a child's behavior affects his/her ability to handle the classroom environment, a meeting with parents, teacher, and support staff will occur. The team may be made up of the following people: parent/guardian, teacher, teacher associate, nurse, behavior interventionist, principal, counselor. This team will develop a plan to assist the child.

Here are some of the types of guidance used in our programs and examples of how they might also be used at home:

- **Positive Redirection:** For example, children are throwing toys. A *positive redirection* would be to give the children beanbags and a basket for a beanbag toss as an appropriate alternative.
- **Ignoring misbehavior when appropriate:** Often the best way to discourage negative behavior like showing-off or pouting is to ignore it. Instead pay attention and praise the child when he or she demonstrates positive behavior.
- **Choices to control the situation and not the child:** Use choices with limits. Instead of saying, "Do you want to ride in your car seat?" You might say, "Do you want to hold your book or your toy while you are in your car seat?"
- **Use "First—Then statements:** For example, "First put on your coat, **then** we will go outside."
- **Use of natural and logical consequences:** *Natural:* "You splashed water on the floor when you were washing your hands, so you need to help clean it up." *Logical:* "You hit a child with this toy; so I'm going to put this toy away for today."
- **Acknowledging children's feelings:** By helping children recognize and name their own feelings they begin to learn that people may have different feelings about the same things, and that's ok. This also helps children begin to control the behaviors associated with strong feelings.
- **St. Theresa Catholic School does not use corporal punishment of any kind.**

The St. Theresa Catholic School Student/Family handbook is available on our school website, www.sainttheresaiowa.org/school or you may contact your school office 515-277-0178 for more information.

Academic Responsibility

Students of St. Theresa Catholic School will show academic responsibility by:

- Demonstrating a positive attitude
- Coming to school prepared to learn
- Assuming accountability for one's own learning
- Not disrupting learning for classmates and peers

It shall be an expressed condition of enrollment that the students behave in a manner, both on and off campus, that is consistent with the Christian principles of this school. These principles include, but are not limited to, the policies, principles, or procedures set forth in our school's handbooks.

State of Iowa Annual Notice

Notice: Corporal Punishment, Restraint, and Physical Confinement and Detention

State law forbids school employees from using corporal punishment against any student. Certain actions by school employees are not considered corporal punishment. Additionally, school employees may use “reasonable and necessary force, not designed or intended to cause pain” to do certain things, such as prevent harm to persons or property.

State law also places limits on school employees’ abilities to restrain or confine and detain any student. The law limits why, how, where, and for how long a school employee may restrain or confine and detain a child. If a child is restrained or confined and detained, the school must maintain documentation and must provide certain types of notice to the child’s parent.

If you have any questions about this state law, please contact your school. The complete text of the law and additional information is available on the Iowa Department of Education’s web site: www.iowa.gov/educate.



Environmental Safety

- Teachers and school staff are responsible for the supervision, guidance and safety of children throughout the school day.
- Parents and guardians have unrestricted access to their own child (except during a building lock-down.)
- The school district has written emergency plans for fire, tornado, and intruders. These plans include evacuation sites. Emergency evacuation plans are posted at all exits. Emergency numbers for police, fire department, Poison Control Center and ambulance service are posted by all phones. Children’s emergency information is accessible to staff.
- All full-time teachers have current First Aid and CPR certification.
- No smoking is allowed within the facility, or on the playground.
- First aid kits are clearly labeled and available within the center and in the outdoor play area.
- All classrooms clean and sanitize surfaces as indicated in the Cleaning and Sanitation Frequency Table. Please contact the classroom teacher for a copy of the table.
- All staff are certified in Universal Precautions to protect against the spread of potentially infectious body fluids. Please contact the school nurse for detailed information.



Lock-Down

A lock-down is a safety measure we take in response to a threat directly to the school or in the surrounding neighborhood. As a part of the Diocesan Emergency Response Plan, all school buildings hold lock-down drills, just as we do fire and tornado drills. The teachers talk with students and read a story about lockdown drills prior to the first drill.

During a lock-down:

- All school activities are moved indoors.
- Exterior doors and classroom doors are locked.
- No one is allowed to enter or exit the building. Parents may not enter or exit the school during a lock-down. This is for your safety and the safety of your child.

Parents: Please be sure that the teacher has your most up-to-date emergency contact information. In the event of a lock-down or other emergency, school staff will use that information to contact you.

Following a lock-down, parents will be informed that the school was placed on lock-down, the nature of the incident, and how long the lock-down was in place.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS and FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

St. Theresa Catholic School works with each family to create the best possible experiences for their child's growth and social development. We believe that:

- You are your child's first and best teacher.
- Children do best when parents and classroom teachers work together.
- Parents who support and extend their child's learning contribute to their child's success both in school and in life.
- Parent input is vital to program improvement. Input can be provided through parent surveys, participation in monthly school board meetings.



Home Visits and Conferences

- Family visiting is an important part of our Early Childhood program. These visits usually take place in the child's home. Early childhood staff will make **one** visit to your home a year. Ideally, this visit takes place before the child starts in the classroom.
- There will also be **two parent-teacher conferences** at school per year. During visits and conferences teachers will share information about your child's progress. You can share information, strengths and concerns about your child at this time. This information is helpful to the teaching staff as they plan learning activities for your child and the other children in the classroom.
- Parents and guardians may request additional conferences with staff any time.



School Library

Students will visit the school library weekly. Students may check out 1 book at a time. When they return a book they will be able to check out a new book to take home and enjoy.



Newsletters

A weekly newsletter will keep you informed of classroom, school and community-based activities and opportunities. Check your child's backpack regularly for notes and other classroom information. Every Tuesday your child's communication folder will be sent home. Tuesday is also when the school office emails their weekly communication.



Parent Involvement

Parents are welcome to join us for classroom activities, field trips, and parties/celebrations. If parents are unable to attend events during the school day there will be 2 evening concerts, and many other evening events hosted by our schools PTC.



Homework

Research shows that worksheets and other homework that is typical in older grades is not an effective way for preschoolers to learn. Here are the types of developmentally appropriate homework we use:

1. Weekly FrogStreet newsletters contain ideas for quick and fun learning activities you can do at home.
2. Reading books: We know that the more time children spend looking at books and reading with adults the more successful they tend to be when learning to read. You can borrow books from our lending libr

JMC is a communication application used by the Diocese of Des Moines to communicate with families. Families new to the diocese will receive information about how to sign up for JMC. Parents who have used JMC in previous years can use the same log-in: their cell phone number or email address and their self-selected password.

School Readiness Goals

School Readiness means that we are working to be sure that, by the end of preschool, children are ready for kindergarten. The Early Childhood department sets specific school readiness goals each year in four areas; reading, math, social skills, and attendance. Look for a poster in your child's classroom with the goals for this year.



Support Services for Families

Successful early learning starts with strong parent-child relationships and family well-being; by supporting families we know we can help children succeed in school. Please contact the school office if you need resources.



Transition to Kindergarten

One of the goals of the Early Childhood programs is to assist children and families to successfully move from preschool to kindergarten. Families are encouraged to be actively engaged in helping to prepare children for kindergarten by participating in a variety of different activities including home visits, conferences, Family Events, field trips and related learning and reading activities in the home.

During the spring months,

- For children who are 5 years old on or before September 15th, parents will receive information regarding enrollment/registration information in February.
- Students will participate in a visit day where they spend some time with the Kindergarten teachers.



Volunteering

Parents are encouraged to participate in our program. Your participation is welcome in the following areas:

- Decision-making about the design and operation of the program
- Helping in the classroom
- Preparing materials for the classroom
- Developing and participating in activities for parents

All prospective volunteers must complete a volunteer application and consent to a background check including but not limited to screening for assault, felony convictions, child and dependent abuse charges. They also need to complete an online child safety VIRTUS training and turn in the completion certificate. Ask your child's teacher for the forms.

Website

The web address for St. Theresa Catholic School is www.sainttheresaschool.org/school –a great resource for forms, upcoming events, and contact information for staff.