



St. Monica Early  
Learning Center



P3-PreK  
[www.stmonicasea.org](http://www.stmonicasea.org)

## St. Monica PreK Program

### Most Commonly Asked Questions:

Additional questions, please contact Program Director, Talina Birashk, at [tbirashk@stmonicasea.org](mailto:tbirashk@stmonicasea.org).

#### Academics

1. What are centers?
  - Centers is what we call free play. The classroom is broken up into “centers” to be more appealing to young children. They have the art center, block center, reading and writing center etc. This way student materials stay somewhat contained to a designated area and children become familiar with where things go when it’s time to clean up. Our expectation is that the room be cleaned in under 9 minutes (it’s usually done in 6-7).
2. What are the specialist or special classes offered to the youngest St. Monica students?
  - PreK students attend music and library every other week in the big school; Spanish once a week with the specialist and once with the Sunshine teacher (who is fluent in Spanish), and they have yoga and movement once a week with the classroom teachers.
3. Is Spanish offered to PreK?
  - Yes! PreK meets with the Spanish specialist once a week, has a formal lesson with the teaching assistants weekly and does various daily activities in Spanish such as calendar and weather, counting, and some prayers.
4. What are the benefits of the Maker Space center?
  - Your children will bring home wonderfully creative art work they make at school using items from the Maker Space shelf. These items are recyclables teachers and students collect to reuse for art. You will not see a lot of “cookie cutter” crafts. Allowing children to create rather than copy work gives them the chance to practice important skills: independence, problem solving, spacial awareness, planning and executing, artistic representation, fine motor exercise, and ultimately trains them to think “outside the box”, a skill that we value at our STEM+ Arts school.
5. What is small group?
  - Small group is the one of the core academic periods of the day (though not the only one). Students are required to sit with a teacher in groups of 3-4 to complete a task in the subjects of writing, phonics (reading), math, and comprehension each week. Small group is when we need parent volunteers. The more helpers we have the further we can bring each child in their academics.
6. When is science offered?
  - Science materials are provided throughout the classroom and playground for exploration. PreK does a formal science unit several times throughout the school year with a STEM based approach. For example, we will spend several weeks exploring garbage and recycling and their impacts on the environment and what we can do to help the planet.

7. How do you incorporate STEM in prek routine?
  - STEM is PreK is active exploration, something young children do naturally. All through the classroom and playground we have materials out for students to explore instinctively. Scales, tape measures, sensory tables, hammers and nails, blocks. We also have teacher-lead units to get them thinking outside the box while testing their own theories and ideas.
8. How often do you change dramatic play and do you allow dress up?
  - Dramatic play changes with the interest of the students. When the students start to show interest in other areas or are no longer showing interest in the dramatic play we have set up we will change it. This typically happens every 3-4 weeks.
9. Do you do any crafts?
  - We do 1-3 religion crafts a month to reinforce and assess their knowledge of recent religion lessons. Crafting allows children to practice following multiple steps and directions to get to an end result.

### **School Community**

10. How often do they do religion?
  - All PreK students are expected to attend Mass once every 3-4 weeks with their classroom teachers. 15 minutes daily religion lessons are taught using the Archdiocese recommended curriculum Stories of God's Love. These are engaging hands on activities that reinforce bible stories. Students are taught five prayers in PreK; Lord's Prayer, Prayer Before Meals, Guardian Angel, Hail Mary and Glory Be.
  - Our PreK students work all year to help Friends of the Needy. A program run through St. Monica Parish church. Friends of the Needy is a meal delivery service that serves about 100 hot home cooked meals to those in need every Tuesday. The PreK class bakes them desserts, makes cards, collects clean socks, and canned food to also be delivered. Our class moto is "our hands were made for helping." We teach our youngest children that together they can change the world with love and kindness.
  - All 30 PreK students come together once a week for a Values and Virtues class with Talina Birashk; where we practice and discuss what it looks like to be kind, responsible, grateful, patient, compassionate, respectful, optimistic, and show courage, unity and perseverance. These classes are done through playful puppet shows, images to start conversations and acting. Students who demonstrate these virtues in the classroom are honored each month with a Heart of Gold award.
11. What are your discipline practices?
  - At this age misbehavior is typically due to a misunderstanding or a desire to be included. So when there is an issue students are first assisted in expressing their frustrations and ideas. If the misbehavior continues they are directed to another activity and spoken to about how to make better choices next time. Time outs are only used if a misbehavior is reoccurring or could cause harm to other children. In that event an "oops note" is sent home alerting the parents of the situation. The final step would be that the child is sent home and can only return after a parent conference has been held to make sure family and school are on the same page to manage the misbehavior.
12. How do you empower children to be independent and work toward personal care/responsibility?
  - Students are expected to carry their backpacks into the classroom each morning and do their daily jobs; wash hands, get a chair, pencils, journals, and check in on the SMART board. Students also have classroom jobs to give them a sense of pride and ownership of their classroom. At lunch students need to open their lunch packaging if they cannot they are encouraged to use a tool (scissors, spoon etc.) or ask a friend before seeking teacher help.

13. How do you communicate with parents?

- A weekly newsletter is sent out giving important information. We have a “door is always open” policy at St. Monica PreK. Parents are always welcome in the classrooms to help. We are all available by phone or email with a 24-48 hour response time. You are also encouraged to schedule a conference with the teacher if you ever have pressing concerns or curiosities. Parent teacher conferences are held in October and January.
- All students have a homework folder they bring to and from school daily. Inside the folder we attach a monthly calendar with upcoming events and important weekly reminders. The folder is designed to be checked by the parents every day after school.

14. How do we celebrate birthdays?

- We celebrate birthday months on the last Friday of the month and all families of kids born that month coordinate one party together. (e.g. all students born in January will celebrate together at one lunch-time celebration). 8<sup>th</sup> graders come down and sing to the students, give them a birthday crown and teachers give out a couple small gifts.

15. Do the two classes co-mingle during the day?

- Yes! Students in both classrooms will be going to kindergarten so we intentionally have designed periods throughout the week where all 30 students come together to build a sense of community. They are together for service projects, Values and Virtues meetings, some religion activities, Mass, P.E. and Library.

16. Do PreK students wear uniforms?

- Yes they do. Uniform information can be found on our school website. Girls wear a plaid or solid green jumper, boys wear navy or khaki pants with a white polo. Both wear a green sweater with the school logo and closed toed shoes.

## Healthy Kids

17. Do we pack a cold lunch or buy from the cafeteria?

- Parents are asked to send their child to school each day with a lunch box full of healthy foods. The classrooms have a saying to “eat meat, cheese, fruits and vegetables first, everything else you save for last.” The nutritional value in these foods (or food groups) help children sustain their energy for their long day and builds strong brains.

18. What is running recess?

- Running outside increases blood flow to the brain and “wakes” children up, getting them ready to learn. We do running recess right before small group academic work to help students focus and reach their learning goals for the day. They run the length of the lower soccer field, to the fence and back.

19. Why are they at recess for so long each day?

- Recess is another chance for students to express themselves, learn their strengths and weaknesses, negotiate and problems solve and grow as social people. They are also exercising their gross motor muscles to improve balance, coordination, speed, and athletic ability. Our outdoor playground has art, building, digging, water, ball field, observation materials, and gardening.

20. Who provides snack, how is it offered?

- Each parent is assigned a week to provide snack for the whole program, both classrooms. You are encouraged to shop with your child so they can feel proud to bring snack in and share with their friends. Snack is offered during centers as a choice. Students are not required or made to sit down and eat it. Snack is set out around 9:30 each morning and is available until 11:00.

21. Why do we have rest time?

- Rest time, or quiet reading comes after small group and is a time for students to calm their bodies and process the activities they just experienced. When the body is at rest the brain is able to store what it just learned to recall the new information later. Resting gives the brain time to grow and become stronger. Which is also why an early bedtime is so important at this young age.